

D *Vilnis Sipols*
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**Battles
Before
World War II**

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This book reviews some of the trickiest problems of prewar years as well as causes and circumstances behind the outbreak of World War II, and the aggressive scheming by the fascist states. It offers a detailed analysis of the policy of appeasement whereby the Western powers had encouraged German, Italian and Japanese aggression. Much of the book is about the Soviet diplomatic effort to forestall fascist aggression and prevent war.

The book presents copious hitherto unpublished material from Soviet and foreign archives.

Vilnis Sipols

Diplomatic Battles Before World War II



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ДИПЛОМАТИЧЕСКАЯ БОРЬБА
НАКАНУНЕ ВТОРОЙ МИРОВОЙ ВОЙНЫ

На английском языке

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INTRODUCTION

With more than forty years gone since the outbreak of the Second World War, there is unabating interest in the events that had led up to it. It is important, first and foremost, to see clear who was responsible for that war and how, if at all, it could have been averted.

One plain fact is that the Second World War had been engineered by the German, Italian and Japanese imperialists. In the mid-1930s they had started an outright struggle for world domination, having first launched a frantic drive to prepare their economies and armed forces for war and installed terrorist fascist dictatorships.

Confronting the bloc of fascist aggressors was the Anglo-Franco-American group of imperialist powers intent on retaining their own dominating position in the world which they had gained through their victory in World War I. The aggregate potential of the Anglo-Franco-American group of nations, together with other countries which were close to them, was superior to that of the aggressors. But the ruling circles of Britain, France and the United States felt they had nothing to gain from another world war. So they sought to preserve and, if possible, consolidate their world positions without war.

In spite of the worsening relations between the imperialist powers, the basic antagonism was still between them and the world's first socialist state.

The fascist aggressors did not even bother to conceal that they regarded fighting communism and destroying the Soviet state as basic to their foreign policy programme. So the Anglo-Franco-American group decided to do everything possible to compose its differences with them at the Soviet Union's expense. The British foreign service was particular-

ly active. Britain's reactionary governing quarters bent every effort to strike an imperialist deal with the Nazi Reich so as to divert its aggression from the British Empire eastward, against the Soviet Union.

The Soviet Government clearly saw the formidable danger hanging over the USSR as extremely explosive hotbeds of war cropped up in the capitalist fold. The Soviet people were faced by the hardest and crucial task of saving their land from destruction in the flames of a worldwide war.

As the danger of war loomed larger, the Soviet government did everything possible to accelerate economic growth and build up national defence capability. It was precisely the strength and power of the Soviet Union that the aggressors had to take into account, above all, as they figured out whether to attack the USSR.

The Soviet diplomacy undertook a vigorous effort to use whatever opportunity there was to oppose aggression, as the fascist powers menaced not only the Soviet Union, but many other nations, large and small. That menace created certain requisites for co-operation between the capitalist countries, thus threatened, and the USSR. So the Soviet Government did its best to bring the nations anxious to prevent war into a common front to counter the aggression.

The Soviet Union was aware of the entire complexity of the problem. For it meant, in point of fact, establishing co-operation with one group of imperialist powers having no stake in war under the prevailing circumstances against another group on course for aggression. The reason why the USSR sought such co-operation was because it wanted to safeguard both its own security and the peace of the world.

Soviet diplomacy laid bare the aggressors' expansionist plans, exposed the mortal danger they spelled for many nations and peoples, and worked hard to stop the aggressor powers from tacking together their anti-Soviet blocs and drawing more states into them. At the same time it exposed the scheming of the reactionary governing circles of Western powers in trying to placate the aggressors at Soviet expense and getting them to destroy the Soviet state.

At the same time, Soviet diplomacy advanced a constructive action programme to keep the peace, curb the fascist aggressors and stop the drift to war. It called for dependable collective security systems to be set up in Europe and

in the Far East in order to raise insurmountable barriers in the aggressors' way.

The Soviet Union's vigorous efforts for peace and international security, its resistance to fascist aggressors and determined support for the victims of aggression earned it immense international prestige. The peace-loving people of all lands saw the world's first socialist nation as the standard-bearer in the battle to safeguard peace and prevent war.

The Soviet Union's foreign policy of the 1930s was a clear indication of its steadfast commitment to peace.

Chapter I

THE GATHERING CLOUDS OF WAR

GERMANY, JAPAN AND ITALY ON THE WARPATH

There was an essential change in the balance and alignment of forces between the major imperialist powers in the early 1930s. Germany, Japan and Italy, ruled by ultra reactionary fascist forces, warlords and monopolists openly sought to redraw the map of the world. They challenged the Anglo-Franco-American group of powers in a bid to dislodge them from their dominant positions. It is that struggle of the German, Japanese and Italian aggressors for world supremacy that led up to the outbreak of the Second World War. Lenin pointed out that " 'world domination' is, to put it briefly, the substance of imperialist policy, of which imperialist war is the continuation".¹

The land-grabbing plans of Germany, Japan and Italy were a formidable danger to many nations.

Hotbed of War in the Far East

The first hotbed of another imperialist war was created by the Japanese militarists. Japan, one of the victor powers in the First World War, reaped a sizeable proportion of the spoils in the Far East and in the Pacific. The success, gained without an extra effort, moreover, whetted the expansionist ambitions of the country's ruling elite and fostered the samurai spirit of the Japanese warlords. They dreamed of fresh conquests and of domination over the whole of East Asia and the Pacific.

The worst ever economic crisis which broke out in the capitalist world at the time exacerbated the contradictions between the imperialist powers. Japanese-American relations were extremely strained. Back in 1918, Lenin, speak-

ing of the Japanese-American imperialist contradictions, pointed out that "the economic development of these countries has produced a vast amount of inflammable material which makes inevitable a desperate clash between them for domination of the Pacific Ocean and the surrounding territories".²

The U.S. ruling circles attached paramount importance to expanding and consolidating the American "invisible empire". The U.S. home market could not absorb all the output of American industry which had greatly expanded to fulfil World War I orders. American monopolies were looking for more markets and more room for investment. The Washington system of treaties, concluded after World War I, anchored the American principle of "open doors" and "equal opportunities" in China. Big Business counted on the United States' economic power enabling it to penetrate the vast Chinese market and capture dominant positions in it. The crisis whetted the appetites of American monopolies.

Japan's increasing economic penetration of China and a prospect for American monopolies to be driven out of the Chinese market altogether in the event of China being overrun by Japan were a formidable challenge to the U.S. At the time, however, the United States strove to avoid an armed confrontation with Japan. Late in 1933, a well-informed American journalist Knickerboker pointed out in a conversation with the Press Department Chief of the Soviet Embassy in Berlin that American government sources thought a Japanese-American war inevitable. The U.S. was intensely preparing for that war and building up a powerful naval and air force. Meanwhile, its policy towards Japan was one of peace gestures to gain time. On the other hand, the U.S. government felt sure that Japan would first attack the USSR to capture the Soviet Far East so as to reinforce her rear, and only after that would she start her projected mammoth battle against the U.S. over the Pacific.³

Japan's aggressive ambitions had likewise accentuated the Anglo-Japanese contradictions. British imperialism had penetrated the Far East, and China, in particular, when Japan was still no rival for it to fear. In the East, Britain was in possession of such major military and economic strongpoints as Hong Kong, Singapore, etc. Many big British commercial, industrial and financial companies, with assets

adding up to 1,500 million dollars, were ruling the roost in China. Yet by the early 1930s, Japanese imperialists were treading on the heels of British colonialists. Japan had a larger force in the Far East than the British Empire which had its possessions and armed forces scattered in all continents.

The British foreign service, seeing no chance of success in an open confrontation with Japan, chose to seek an imperialist collusion with her, agreeable to a certain repartition of the spheres of influence in her favour in the Far East.

True, should Britain have joined forces with other nations, they could have stood up against Japanese expansionism in that zone. The matter came before the League of Nations, too, but the British Government did not find it possible to resort to economic or other sanctions against Japan.⁴

There was, however, full unanimity between the governments of the U.S. and Britain on one point: both would have been pleased most to see Japanese aggression directed against the USSR rather than against China. British conservative quarters believed, the Soviet Ambassador I. M. Maisky wrote on March 10, 1933, that the capture of Manchuria by the Japanese could lead to a war between the USSR and Japan, and that, in their opinion, would have been a "real blessing of history".⁵

Now, with British secret archives of the prewar years available to historians, there is enough incontrovertible evidence on hand to bear out this account of British policy. Two most influential members of the British Government, Neville Chamberlain and John Simon, submitted a memorandum calling for improved relations with Japan, notably, for concluding a non-aggression pact with her. Their principal argument was this: "As regards Russia, anything that makes Japan feel more secure tends to encourage her in an aggressive attitude towards Russia".⁶

Influential reactionary circles of the United States were also hopeful of a conflict between Japan and the USSR. American imperialism was interested in such a war between the USSR and Japan anyway, because the U.S. craved for both the Soviet Union and Japan to be weakened.

The ruling circles of Britain and the United States had enough reason to expect an armed clash between Japan and

the USSR. On course for aggression ever since 1931, the Japanese imperialists seized Northeast China (Manchuria), setting up a puppet state of Manzhou-Guo. Along with planning for continued aggression against China, the Japanese samurai coveted the Soviet Far East and the Mongolian People's Republic. Japan had more than once rejected the Soviet proposals for concluding a non-aggression pact between the USSR and Japan.

Japan's War Minister, General Araki energetically plumped for attacking the USSR. He told a conference of governors in 1933 that "in the pursuit of her national policy, Japan is bound to confront the Soviet Union" and that it was "necessary for Japan to take possession, by force of arms, of the territory of Primorye (Maritime Territory), Trans-Baikal and Siberia".⁷ The British military attache in Tokyo E. A. H. James said the position of the quarters represented by Araki was that "it is necessary to fight Russia sooner rather than later".⁸ A Foreign Office Memorandum to the British Government in May 1933 also stated that "the Japanese Army concentrates its whole attention on a future war with Russia".⁹ On June 2, Araki and his supporters got the Japanese Emperor, Hirohito, to decide that the Soviet Union was Japan's "Enemy Number One",¹⁰ i.e., military preparations had to be made, first of all, for a war against the USSR. The German military attache in the USSR, Hartmann, reported the same news to Berlin, referring to statements by the Japanese military attache in Moscow, Kawabe. He wrote that "the Soviet Union is not desirous of war and is doing its best to avert it," but the Japanese could start hostilities as early as the spring of 1934.¹¹

Japan was making intense preparations for a war against the USSR. Manchuria and Korea which she had seized were turned into one vast bridgehead. The strength of the Kwangtung Army stationed in Manchuria was being increased, and military installations, roads, depots, barracks and airfields were being built. Following the seizure of Manchuria and part of North China in 1933, the Japanese Army General Staff specified and particularised its war plan (Plan "Otsu"); it called for 24 out of the 30 projected divisions to be provided for military operations against the Soviet Union. The opening one was to have seized Maritime Territory to be followed up by a strike at Lake Baikal area.¹²

The Soviet government was well aware of the danger looming across the Far Eastern border of the USSR. Ambassador William Bullitt, reporting to Washington about his conversation with J. V. Stalin and K. Y. Voroshilov on December 20, 1933, wrote that, in discussing the situation in the Far East, the Soviet leaders voiced most serious apprehension over the possibility of a Japanese attack in the coming spring.¹³ People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs Maxim Litvinov declared on December 29, 1933, that the policy of Japan "is now the darkest storm-cloud on the international political horizon".¹⁴

Aggressive Designs of the Nazi Reich

A yet more dangerous hotbed of another imperialist world war appeared shortly in Central Europe with the rise of Nazi Germany. The German imperialists, notwithstanding their defeat in the First World War, had not desisted from their aggressive plans. Having outstripped her old rivals, Britain and France, in industrial development by the late 1920s, Germany set about rebuilding her military power in order not only to take revenge for the defeat, she had sustained, but redraw the map of Europe at her own discretion.

The National Socialist Party which had come to power in Germany openly declared its objective of establishing a "new order" in Europe and the world. The progressive press was perfectly right in describing the 30th of January, 1933, when Hitler became the Chancellor of Germany, as the "Black Day" for Europe. German monopolies backed up the Nazis who promised to restore the power of Germany, crush the revolutionary movement inside the country and open the way for German imperialism to grab foreign lands.

The Nazis intended to start carrying out their aggressive designs by setting up a strike force in Central Europe in the shape of a Nazi Reich with a population of 90-100 million of people of the so-called Aryan origin. "Austria belongs to this nucleus", Hitler argued in 1932. "This goes without saying. But it comprises, besides, Bohemia and Moravia, as well as the Western regions of Poland... The Baltic states are part of this nucleus also." The population of Poland, Czechoslovakia and the Baltic states, except the

Germans residing there and the "elements fit for Germanisation", was to have been destroyed or evicted. Nature is cruel, Hitler maintained, and if the Nazis can, without the slightest pity, send the cream of the German nation into the crucible of war, they can, with even greater reason, "destroy millions of people of an inferior race".¹⁵

The Nazis planned to subject a whole system of vassal states to this Nazi Reich and create a "thousand-year empire" with the German "race of masters" dominating them all. That was to have been followed up, according to the Nazi plans, by a full-scale expansion into other continents. Their ultimate goal was world supremacy.¹⁶

When the Nazi chancellor set out his programme before the German army chiefs, on February 3, 1933, he announced his plan to strengthen the Wehrmacht to the utmost so as to achieve "political might". That "political might" was to be used, Hitler declared, for: "Winning more living space in the East and its ruthless Germanisation".¹⁷

The German Nazis saw a cruel and merciless total war as the way to establish their world domination.¹⁸ "War", Hitler said, "is the most natural and the most common thing. War is ever, war is everywhere. There is no beginning, no peaceful end. War is life... So I want war."¹⁹

The ambitions of the Nazi Reich in foreign affairs were based on the aggressive aspirations of German imperialism, militarism, landed aristocracy and big monopolies, which had been harboured ever since the days of Bismarck, but the Nazis imparted a particularly sinister character to them.²⁰

Having drawn their own conclusion from Germany's bitter experience in World War I, the Nazis decided to advance towards their goals step by step, crush their adversaries one by one, starting with the weakest. A possibility of yet another war on two fronts at once—in the East and in the West—looked like a dreadful nightmare to them. "The mistake of confronting England, France and Russia should not, of course, be repeated",²¹ von Ribbentrop said.

The Nazis made full use of their diplomatic service to disunite the possible adversaries and collude with some of them against others. They intended to abide by those treaties and agreements for just as long as they found that to be of benefit to themselves. "Why mustn't I conclude treaties in good faith today so as to break them in cold blood

tomorrow?"²²—Hitler declared. The "threat of Bolshevism" was another argument the Nazis played up trying to set the nations of Europe apart. Hostility towards the USSR was, the Nazis hoped, to have assured them the sympathy of the reactionary forces of all capitalist countries.

The Nazis considered the routing of the USSR and seizure of Soviet lands to be their major task, but they realised how complex it was. "Soviet Russia", Hitler said, "is a difficult task, I can hardly begin with it."²³

A feverish German arms build-up ensued. The Nazis coined the motto "guns before butter". The magnates of German industry blessed that policy. In April 1933 the Imperial Federation of German Industries submitted to Hitler a plan for industrial reorganisation to prepare for war.

In October 1933 Germany walked out of the Geneva Disarmament Conference, thereby showing to the entire world that she was on the warpath, and made no bones about it. At the same time, the Nazis announced their withdrawal from the League of Nations as it, too, could have been a certain hindrance to their plans for total aggression.

There was an alliance of aggressors in the making, setting out to carve the world up and bring it under their own domination. They had fascism as their ideological weapon—an undisguised terroristic dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinistic and most imperialistic elements of Big Business.

The world situation as it shaped up came under scrutiny at the 17th Congress of the CPSU(B) in January-February, 1934. The policies of Japan and Germany, with extreme reactionaries, fascists and warlords in power, made it absolutely clear, as the Central Committee of the CPSU(B) stated in its Report to the Congress, that "there are frantic preparations under way for a repartition of the world and revision of the spheres of influence", for a new imperialist war. "Once again, just like in 1914", it was pointed out at the Congress, "the parties of bellicose imperialism, the parties of war and revenge, are coming to the fore." The danger of fascism was especially emphasised. The Report of the Central Committee of the CPSU(B) pointed out: "Chauvinism and preparation for war as basic elements of foreign policy, and the tanning of the working class and a reign of terror in home policy as an indispensable means of streng-

thening the rear of the future war fronts—that is what preoccupies most the present-day imperialist politicians.” That applied to German imperialism, first and foremost.²⁴

So it was demonstrated at the Congress that imperialism as a social and economic system was breeding another world war and that fascism was playing a special role in engineering it. “Fascism is war” was the conclusion the Communists made under those particular circumstances.

Plans for a “Crusade” Against the USSR

Nazi Germany’s expansionist ambitions were an enormous danger to the people of all European nations. So it was a matter of vital concern for them to curb the fascist aggressors and thwart their man-hating plans. The ruling circles of the Western powers held different views, however.

The course of events in Europe and in the world largely depended on the position of Britain. The British Empire, just like many other nations, was in danger of attack by the Nazi Reich. Had Britain been resolved to resist aggression together with the Soviet Union, France and other countries, the aggressive action by the Nazi powers could have been checked and peace safeguarded. But it was not the peace-keeping, but their own far-reaching imperialist plans that were uppermost in the minds of the reactionary politicians who ruled Britain at the time.

Fascism by itself did not worry the City tycoons. On the contrary, the British reactionaries hailed the fascist dictatorships in Italy and Germany. They saw those regimes as props to shore up capitalism and barriers to stem the rising tide of revolutionary struggle of the working class in Europe. At the same time, the British ruling circles hoped to use Hitler Germany as a weapon to fight the USSR with. Their basic principle was that “if Britain is to live Bolshevism must die!”²⁵ So the ruling circles of Britain regarded Hitler Germany, above all, as a potential class ally in action against the Soviet Union rather than as a dangerous imperialist rival. The British government looked for an accommodation with the Nazi Reich in the hope of stabilising the situation in Western Europe by making some concessions to it, and canalising German aggression eastward, against the USSR.

That is to say that the reactionary ruling circles of Bri-

tain were thinking, first and foremost, not of how to resist fascist aggression, but of how to stop the wheel of history, check the worsening general crisis of capitalism and prevent progressive social change gaining ground in the world and, above all, destroy the first socialist state.

British imperialism’s policy on the “legitimacy of wars” did not differ from Hitler’s and Mussolini’s views. References to this issue in British historical literature usually mention Maurice Hankey who had been the British Government’s secretary for 20 years (1919-1938) and, therefore, embodies the continuity of its policies. Hankey said that war was “the right and proper process by which things move in this world”. And it would be naive to expect, he pointed out, that imperialism could pursue an unimperialist policy.²⁶⁻²⁷

Describing the position of Britain’s ruling circles, the Soviet Embassy in London reported to Moscow on April 25, 1933, that in recent months they had increasingly “tended to galvanise the idea of creating an anti-Soviet front. These trends were arising ... from the triumph of Hitlerism in Germany and the mounting aggressiveness of Japan in the Far East”. Britain’s policy was to “pound her fist in the Russian issue”. That was the policy of setting up a “holy alliance” by which to smash the Soviet Union.

It was rightfully pointed out in the Report of the Central Committee of the CPSU (Bolsheviks) to the Seventeenth Party Congress in January 1934 that invectives in Britain against the USSR could not be considered accidental.

The Nazis, intent on removing all obstacles to Germany’s rearmament and to the preparations for war, encouraged British reactionaries in their hope that their aggressive designs were against the East alone.

A. Rosenberg, one of the ringleaders of nazism, told the British government in May 1933 that Germany was agreeable to relinquish her claims in the West but demanded that in return she should be given the right to rearm, to annex Austria and “adjust” her frontiers with Czechoslovakia and Poland to Germany’s advantage, and to capture the Baltic states. Rosenberg pointed out that Germany would eventually direct her forces against the USSR.

Germany’s Minister of the Economy A. Hugenberg produced a memorandum at the economic conference in London in June 1933 outlining an explicit demand for Germany

to be given some "living space" in the East, partly at the expense of the USSR. A letter from the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, dated June 27, 1933, regarding that unprecedented document, pointed out that "the German government is prepared to join a military coalition against us ... and demands only two things in exchange—the freedom to rearm and compensation at the expense of the USSR. The German government found that the present moment with the possibility of Japan attacking us still not ruled out and with relations with Britain still very strained ... is propitious enough for it to offer its services for the struggle against us." It is clear from the foregoing that Germany's plans included "a war against us and that the present situation is no more than a temporary breathing space."²⁸

The policy of the British ruling circles in seeking an anti-Soviet collusion with the Nazis was abundantly demonstrated by the talks which went on between Britain, France, Germany and Italy to conclude a "pact of understanding and co-operation" (Four Power Pact). The Four Power Pact had been proposed by the Italian fascist leader Mussolini in order to make Italy—on a par with Britain, France and Germany—a full member of the European four-power directorate. At the same time, the Italian fascists expected to compel a revision of the treaties of the Versailles system which arose from the First World War, undermine the positions of France in Europe and, above all, her links with the countries of Southeast Europe and transform the Danubian and the Balkan countries into Italy's "sphere of influence".

To begin with, Mussolini concerted his proposal with the Nazis. On March 14, 1933, he communicated his draft pact to Berlin and on the following day received a blessing from Germany's Foreign Minister von Neurath who called this proposal an "inspired conception".²⁹ That position of Germany was quite understandable. Such an act was to elevate a "vanquished and injured" Germany to a status of equality with Britain and France.³⁰

Mussolini's proposal called for revising the peace treaties and for Germany to be granted the right to rearm. Eventually, Germany hoped to use the Four Power Pact in order to carry out her aggressive plans in the East.

Mussolini handed the draft Four Power Pact he had con-

certed with Hitler to Prime Minister of Britain R. MacDonald who arrived in Rome on March 18 for talks with the Italian government. The British government gave its full backing to that proposal.

The four-power talks ended on July 15, 1933, in the signing of a Four Power Pact in Rome.

The full danger of the plans behind the Four Power Pact was perfectly clear to the Soviet Union. *Izvestia* wrote on March 30, 1933, that the USSR could not stand by watching with indifference the "attempts at setting up a so-called 'four-power concert' arrogating the right to decide the destinies of the nations". During his meeting with the German Ambassador in Moscow von Dirksen on April 3, the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs M. M. Litvinov pointed out that it was quite natural for the states outside the pact to view it negatively.³¹ The Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs N. N. Krestinsky declared on June 4, 1933, in a conversation with the Italian Ambassador B. Attolico that "since the four powers concluding this pact have very many points of divergence, it naturally seems that the only point they do not diverge on is their common hostility for communism. The failure to invite us to join in discussing this pact confirms that it is objectively directed against us."³²

The plans of British imperialism, connected with the conclusion of the Four Power Pact, was demonstrated best of all by yet another rumpus stage-managed in Britain as part of an anti-Soviet campaign during the negotiations about the pact. Back in October 1932 the British government terminated its trade agreement with the USSR and on April 19, 1933, imposed an embargo on the import of all major Soviet export goods into Britain. That amounted, in point of fact, to declaring a trade war on the Soviet Union. At the same time the British Foreign Secretary John Simon declared that the Soviet trade delegation in London was divested of its right of diplomatic immunity. The Soviet Embassy in London had every reason to qualify those acts of the British government as an attempt to pursue a "big stick" policy with regard to the USSR.³³ The British government's position came under criticism even in a number of British newspapers. *The Daily Herald*, for example, described the government's action as a cynical political game without precedent in history.³⁴

The signing of the Four Power Pact brought forth some serious misgivings not only in the USSR but in a number of other countries which could be an object of the four-power deal. That applied, above all, to the countries of Eastern Europe, including the allies of France. In France, too, incidentally, the pact came up against strong opposition. For example, in a memorandum of March 18, 1933, the French Foreign Ministry expressed its apprehension lest the pact should torpedo the League of Nations, destroy the whole system of France's alliances with a number of small nations and also cause her to lose her leading role in Europe since the decisions of the four-power "European directorate" would most often be directed against the interests of France because "Great Britain, Italy and Germany are interested in limiting France's role in Europe."³⁵

The plotting of the Four Power Pact aroused extreme anxiety of the small nations of Europe. They realised, A. V. Lunacharsky, member of the Soviet delegation to the Disarmament Conference, pointed out, that in the event of the four powers uniting, they "will be shared between cruel shepherds like a flock of sheep".³⁶ Even the French press noted that to conclude the pact would mean that France was ignoring the interests of her East European allies. Opposing this "holy alliance" of the Great Powers, the French newspaper *Le Journal* wrote that before cutting off the left leg of Poland, the right arm of Czechoslovakia and both legs of Romania and the limbs of Yugoslavia, it is necessary, at least, as custom would have it, to seek the patients' consent for it. The Four Power Pact came to be quite rightfully called a "pact of butchers".

The serious apprehension of a number of countries over the Four Power Pact stopped it from ever coming into force. The French government did not find it possible to bring it before parliament for ratification.

The rapprochement between Poland and Nazi Germany was yet another factor essentially influencing the alignment of forces in Europe. Germany's Propaganda Minister Goebbels, who was in Geneva in April 1933 at the Disarmament Conference, proposed the following terms for a settlement of German-Polish relations to Poland's Foreign Minister J. Beck: Poland would cede the so-called corridor, that is, the Polish Maritime strip, to Germany while getting an outlet to the sea at the expense of Lithuania and

Latvia. Thereupon, the two countries would go to war against the USSR and, with the Ukraine captured, Poland would also obtain an outlet to the Black Sea, including Odessa.³⁷ The talks on these questions were continued during another Goebbels-Beck meeting in September.

Being well informed of the aggressive intentions of Polish reactionaries under Pilsudski, the Nazis decided to use them in their own interests, making Poland their "ally" for a while. By whetting the appetites of Polish imperialist elements, the Nazis were trying to convince them that, together, they would be in a position to overpower the USSR. Although Poland herself was in danger of being overpowered by Nazi aggressors who were dreaming of seizing her territory and exterminating her population, Poland's governing quarters would not give up their own plans for grabbing foreign lands. The Seventh World Congress of the Communist International stated that "German imperialism has found an ally in Europe—*fascist Poland*, which is also striving to extend its territory at the expense of Czechoslovakia, the Baltic countries and the Soviet Union."³⁸

The Polish ruling quarters wanted to time the realisation of their plans for capturing more of Soviet land to coincide with a Japanese invasion of the USSR. The Chief of the Eastern Department of Poland's Foreign Ministry T. Schaetzel said in a conversation with the Bulgarian Charge d'Affaires in July 1934 that Poland "expects that should a war break out in the Far East, Russia will be crushed, and then Poland will include Kiev and some of the Ukraine within her borders."³⁹ The Polish Ambassador to Japan did not even find it necessary to conceal that he had received a lot of money from his government to work towards pushing Japan into a war against the USSR so that this war could be "used by Poland and Germany for an offensive against the Ukraine".⁴⁰ The British Foreign Office had some information to the effect that Poland's policy was "to divide Russia into a group of separate states independent of Moscow".⁴¹ The governments and, more particularly, the military quarters of Poland and Japan established the closest ever co-operation against the Soviet Union.

The People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs M. M. Litvinov, speaking with American diplomat W. Bullitt, spelled out the apprehensions the Soviet Union had on that account. The People's Commissar pointed out that the Soviet govern-

ment considered "an attack by Japan so probable" that it was giving serious attention to the question of her possible allies. Reporting his conversation with the People's Commissar, Bullitt wrote to Washington that Litvinov "knew that conversations had taken place between Germany and Poland looking forward toward an eventual attack on the Soviet Union if the Soviet Union should become embroiled in a long war with Japan; that he feared that a war with Japan might drag on for years and that after a couple of years Germany and Poland combined might attack the Soviet Union".⁴²

Even the British Embassy in Tokyo found it necessary to communicate to London that the Polish and Romanian diplomatic representatives in Japan "are openly saying ... that they would welcome a clash between Russia and Japan".⁴³

Yet another grave danger to the Soviet Union arose from the possibility of Hitler's influence spreading to the Baltic countries and those countries being turned into a bridgehead for attacking the USSR. Litvinov pointed out on April 10, 1933, that the Soviet government would not be likely to view with indifference a "redrawing of the frontiers of the Baltic states". "Polish expansion in the Baltic countries is just as unwelcome for us as Germany",⁴⁴ he said in a conversation with the French Ambassador François Dejean.

The Soviet Union had to fear an act of aggression from Finland, too, in the event of a war with Germany, Poland and Japan. Litvinov wrote that, in all probability, "Germany will be looking for a way to give vent to the military energy she is building up in the direction of the Baltic countries, the USSR..." In that case, she "can well count on support, at least, from Japan, Poland and Finland."⁴⁵

The ruling circles of Finland maintained an extremely hostile and aggressive stand with regard to the USSR. They were planning to capture Soviet Karelia. This was no secret to foreign diplomats in close contact with the ruling elements of Finland. The Polish Minister in Helsinki F. Charwat communicated to Warsaw on December 29, 1933, that Finland's policy was "aggressive against Russia...". Charwat called Finland the "most bellicose state in Europe".⁴⁶ The Latvian Minister in Finland, in his turn, informed Riga on June 16, 1934: "The Karelian issue has gripped the minds of Finnish activists. These elements are impatiently

waiting for Russia to come into conflict with any of the Great Powers, first with Poland and now with Germany or Japan, in order to carry out their programme. This movement ... may one day serve as the spark that will set the powder keg alight."⁴⁷ The former President of Finland P. Svinhufvud said that "any enemy of Russia must always be a friend of Finland".⁴⁸ So the Finnish ruling quarters went on by that guideline.

The so-called activist wing of the Finnish bourgeoisie (Lapuans and others) counted on the implementation of Japan's and Germany's aggressive plans against the USSR creating the conditions for carrying out a programme for a "Greater Finland". On January 11, 1934, Litvinov wrote, with reference to that issue, that "the Lapuans would have Finland extend all the way up to the Urals... and the craziest of them would see the frontier of Finnish lands stretching as far as Altai. Lapuans and activists are pinning great hopes on Japan as well ... Finland is the most anti-Soviet of all the Baltic states."⁴⁹ The former Prime Minister V. Tanner also admitted in a conversation with the Soviet Minister B. Y. Stein that in the event of war in the Far East, the USSR must consider the possibility of a "repetition of the Karelian venture of 1922". No wonder, therefore, that the Japanese aggressors devoted a great deal of attention to Finland. So, the Japanese Charge d'Affaires in Finland pointed out during a meeting with Soviet Minister B. Y. Stein that the Japanese mission in Finland existed at the demand of the country's military circles to meet "the contingency of a Japanese-Soviet war".⁵⁰

Considering that Finland's position in respect to the USSR was growing increasingly hostile, the Soviet government found it necessary to draw the attention of the Finnish government to the abnormal situation shaping up. B. S. Stomonyakov told the Finnish Minister in Moscow A. Yrjö-Koskinen on January 15, 1934, that fairly wide circles and influential organisations in Finland were engaged in aggressive activities against the USSR. These circles, he said, are out to create "Greater Finland" by annexing some of Soviet land. Some of them are "proposing to annex Eastern Karelia and Ingermanland to Finland" while others are circulating maps of a "Greater Finland" with borders stretching as far as the Urals.⁵¹ On his arrival in Helsinki in September, Yrjö-Koskinen could not fail to admit in a

conversation with B. Y. Stein that the ambition to have Karelia and Ingermanland incorporated in Finland at the time of a possible Soviet-Japanese conflict had "become a common judgement in Finland."⁵²

For all the verbal peaceful assurance of the Finnish government, the aggressive trends in the behaviour of Finland's ruling establishment with regard to the USSR, far from declining, were showing themselves up afresh. Under the circumstances, Litvinov stated in a conversation with the Finnish Minister: "In no country is the press conducting so systematic a campaign of hostility against us as it does in Finland. In no country is there such an open propaganda drive on about an attack against the USSR and a seizure of some of its territory, as in Finland."⁵³

Describing the state of Soviet-Finnish relations, the British Minister in Helsinki G. Grant-Watson pointed out that the Soviet Union had recognised the independence of Finland at its own free will, and turned over to her a vast area in the North which had never before formed part of the Grand Duchy of Finland. "Acting in a generous fashion, they doubtless expected to enjoy goodneighbourly relations with Finland, but in this they have been disappointed."⁵⁴

The German Minister in Finland W. von Blücher also reported to Berlin on many occasions that the Soviet Union was honestly striving for friendly relations with Finland, but to no avail. Pronouncements of vehement hostility against the USSR are being made in Finland time and again.⁵⁵

That was how the clouds of war were gathering over the Eastern and Western Soviet borders. Japanese and German imperialists, bent on aggression and war, were turning their eyes to the Soviet lands. The other imperialist powers had enough individuals who were prepared to bless them for a "holy war" against the Soviet state. In certain smaller countries, adjacent to the USSR, there were some influential forces that were ready to join the German and Japanese aggressors in the event of such a war. The Soviet Union—the world's only socialist country at the time—was in a hostile encirclement of capitalist states. It had to rely on its own forces, first and foremost, to defend its socialist gains, its freedom and independence.

SOVIET ACTION FOR PEACE AND FOR THE PREVENTION OF WAR

The Soviet government invariably followed a policy of peace. That was prompted by the very nature of the socialist state striving to spare the mass of the people the incalculable horrors and calamities that imperialist-bred wars bring with them. The Soviet people were anxious to preserve and strengthen peace also because, with the socialist country still encircled by hostile capitalist powers, a war could spell great danger to its very existence.

To keep the peace was likewise an essential and, indeed, indispensable condition for continued progress in building a new type of society in the Soviet Union. Only in a peaceful environment, could the Soviet people concentrate their efforts on advancing the economy, science and culture. Therefore, to ensure this favourable international environment for the attainment of communism was the top priority of Soviet foreign policy.

Setting off Soviet foreign policy against the policies of imperialist powers and exposing the slanderous inventions bourgeois propaganda was circulating about it, Litvinov said: "The Soviet state, which rejects chauvinism, nationalism, racial or national prejudice, sees its national priorities not as conquest, expansion, or extension of its territory, it sees the honour of the people not in educating them in a spirit of militarism and thirst for blood, but only in achieving the ideal it has emerged for and which it sees as the whole sense of its existence, namely, in the construction of socialist society. It intends, unless obstructed, to devote all of its national energies to this work, and this is the inexhaustible wellspring of its policy of peace".⁵⁶ The People's Commissar emphasised that the USSR was in no need even of victorious wars.

The Soviet government was guiding itself in its relations with other countries by the Leninist principle of peaceful coexistence of nations with differing social and economic systems. We have to build socialism, the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs said, in one country, surrounded by capitalist countries which occupy five-sixths of the world's area. We cannot ignore this fact and we do not ignore it and, therefore, we strive to discover and apply the methods of peaceful coexistence of both social systems.⁵⁷

While taking steps to safeguard peace on the Soviet borders, the Soviet government was showing concern for world peace in general. That is why Soviet foreign policy was meeting the interests of the Soviet people as well as those of the people of all nations.

In its mud-slinging campaign against Communists and in an attempt to justify the unwillingness of the reactionary circles of the Western powers to co-operate with the USSR, bourgeois propaganda was claiming all the time that Moscow was dreaming of provoking a war between some capitalist countries. It argued that the Communists were interested in another world war because they believed that only from a war would another revolutionary situation arise.

Yet that had nothing in common with the actual policy of the Soviet Union. Lenin emphasised on many occasions that "all our politics and propaganda are directed towards putting an end to war and in no way towards driving nations to war".⁵⁸ The Communists have always proceeded from the fact that the working masses are the main war victims.

The communist attitude to war was thoroughly examined at the Sixth Congress of the Communist International (1928). It was proved that the assertion that Communists were encouraging imperialist wars to expedite the revolution was sheer slander. It was stressed that "the Communists, in the interests of the masses of the workers and of all the toilers who bear the brunt of the sacrifice entailed by war, wage a persistent fight against imperialist war".⁵⁹

With the Nazis in power, this issue was re-examined in the new context at the Thirteenth Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Communist International in December 1933. Speaking on behalf of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks), D. Z. Manuilsky emphasised that it was a mistake to assume that "it is impossible to hinder the coming of imperialist war, that a real revolution will only begin as a result of a new imperialist war". He pointed out that it was necessary to do everything to prevent a new war. That was, notably, a clear piece of evidence to disprove the spurious assertion of imperialist propaganda that the Soviet Union was dreaming of nothing short of provoking war between imperialist states.⁶⁰

The Comintern reverted to the matter at its Seventh Congress in 1935. The position of Soviet Communists was set out by V. G. Klorin. "Although war will eventually produce

a revolutionary crisis in capitalist countries," he stressed, "it will bring with it incredible hardship, death, hunger and suffering to the working people, wipe out the productive forces of all countries and destroy workers' organisations. War imperils the life of millions of proletarians and the vestiges of democracy which in some countries still give the working people some opportunity to defend their interests under capitalism. War threatens the independence of small and weak nations. It is the greatest calamity for all peoples. Therefore, the Communists, who are defending the interests of the peoples, are the defenders of peace and must avert war."⁶¹ This position of Communists found expression in the resolutions of the Congress: "The Seventh World Congress of the Communist International most determinedly repudiates the slanderous contention that Communists desire war, expecting it to bring revolution."⁶²

The Soviet Communists, too, were in agreement with the guidelines worked out at the Comintern congresses on the issues of war and peace. The struggle of the USSR for curbing aggressors and safeguarding peace, a matter of vital concern to the mass of the people in all countries, was consistent, wholly and entirely, with the major principle of Soviet foreign policy—proletarian internationalism.

The resolution of the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International stated that the peace policy of the USSR was not only directed towards the defence of the Land of the Soviets, "it also protects the lives of the workers of all countries, the lives of all the oppressed and exploited . . . it serves the vital interests of humanity."⁶³ Therefore, Soviet foreign policy was easy and clear for the great mass of the people to understand, and had the support of the masses and the progressive forces of all nations. And that gave it more opportunity for action to keep and strengthen the peace.

The question was, however, how feasible the prospect of preventing war was. Fatalist concepts of the inevitability of wars were rather current in the communist movement on account of the experience of the First World War. But as a new alignment of forces shaped up in the world, a new approach to the problem of averting the war danger was being worked out and the conclusion made that the battle for peace was not hopeless. By the mid-1930s, the USSR had developed into a mighty power and its foreign policy

began to exercise a growing influence on the course of events. The forces of peace now had the consistent peace-seeking policy of the Soviet Union to rely on. Therefore, D. Z. Manuilsky pointed out in his report to the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International that "the Communists must abandon the fatalist view that it is impossible to prevent the outbreak of war, that it is useless fighting against war preparations."⁶⁴

It was stressed in Manuilsky's report on the outcome of the Congress that the new situation compelled a somewhat different view of the working people's prospect in their struggle against war. It is beyond dispute that wars are inevitable as long as capitalism exists. But there are now more opportunities for effective opposition to imperialist wars than there had been before the First World War broke out. This is due, above all, to the existence of the peace-keeping Soviet Union. Small nations whose independence is threatened by war can join the effort to defend peace. Also the big states which do not want war for various reasons can take part in this action against war.⁶⁵

The Soviet Union's persistent efforts for peace and its policy of peaceful coexistence had nothing in common with supine pacifism. While following a policy of peace, the Soviet government was determined to give a fitting rebuff to any aggressive encroachments by imperialist forces.

The Soviet Union was taking whatever steps it could to discourage the aggressors from any war-like ventures across its borders. At the same time, considering that it was not the Soviet Union alone, but other nations as well that faced such a danger, the USSR attached tremendous importance to rallying as many countries as possible for resistance to aggressors. The greatest danger was hanging over some small or militarily rather weak nations. So the Soviet Union was prepared to lend them its support and assistance and to co-operate with them in action to deter aggression.

The Soviet government took into consideration the fundamental contradictions between the two major alignments of capitalist powers. The plans for a repartition of the world, being hatched by the aggressive bloc with Nazi Germany and militarist Japan in the lead, were a threat to the other alignment of imperialist powers - France, Britain and the U.S. which had won the imperialist war of 1914-1918, divided the world at their own discretion as a result of that war,

and strove to retain their world positions. The Soviet government was far from regarding as just the terms of the Versailles-Washington system of peace treaties created by those powers in consequence of their victory in the war. But that did not mean, of course, that it considered another world war necessary in order to have them changed. On the contrary, it was opposed to such a war. And this signified that, if there was a will, it was quite possible to find common ground for joint action by the Soviet Union and this alignment of powers to prevent war.

A number of medium-sized and small nations would have joined such a peace front. The Soviet government deemed the co-operation of all those nations in peace-keeping not only quite possible but necessary as well. This viewpoint inspired the Soviet proposals for organising a collective security system in Europe to oppose aggression.

In the circumstances that prevailed at the time the Soviet government thought it to be the most important task to prevent war by the collective efforts of all nations anxious to keep the peace. The Report of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks) to the Seventeenth Party Congress pointed out that in an environment of "prewar jitters enveloping a wide range of countries, the USSR continued to abide ... firmly and unshakably by its positions of peace, opposed to the threat of war, acting to preserve peace, and anxious to meet halfway those nations which stand, in one way or another, for the maintenance of peace, exposing and unmasking those who prepare and provoke war."

The Seventeenth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party brought out the factors the USSR counted on in its hard and involved battle for peace:

- a) its growing economic and political strength;
- b) moral support from millions of working people of all countries vitally interested in the maintenance of peace;
- c) the common sense of the nations which are not interested, for some reason or other, in a disruption of peace;
- d) the Soviet Armed Forces prepared to defend the nation against attacks from outside.⁶⁶

Soviet foreign policy combined an earnest determination to maintain peace with a readiness to offer a determined resistance to aggression. It guided itself by the immutable principle that "peace must not be waited for, but fought

for". All that made for the high international prestige of Soviet foreign policy.

The subsequent consolidation of the international positions of the USSR and of its influence on the development of international events were directly connected with the growth of the strength and power of the Soviet Union.

Having rebuilt the national economy devastated during World War I, the Civil War and foreign intervention, the Soviet Union had fulfilled its first five-year economic development plan ahead of schedule, by 1933. That was a giant leap forward. Once an agrarian country, the Soviet Union became a modern industrialised nation. It had 1,500 industrial projects launched due to the heroic labour effort of the Soviet people. From now on the Soviet Union could produce most of the industrial plant and equipment it needed at its own enterprises. The second five-year plan (1933-1937), still more sweeping in its scope, began to be carried out.

All that combined created the necessary conditions for the country's defence capability to be strengthened.

As stated in the new Constitution of the USSR, adopted in 1977, the Soviet Armed Forces are called upon to defend the socialist homeland and socialist gains, the peaceful work of the Soviet people, the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the State and its security.⁶⁷ Under the most complicated conditions of those times when the Soviet Union was in a hostile capitalist encirclement, and when imperialist powers went on planning to destroy the world's first socialist state and some of them openly embarked on the path of aggression, the Soviet Armed Forces were effectively discharging these functions.

Urgent steps were taken to bolster the Soviet Far Eastern defences in the face of an imminent danger of armed attack by Japan. The Soviet Pacific Fleet began to be built in 1932. The building up of the Soviet Air Force in the Far East had a sobering effect on the Japanese aggressors.

The Soviet government did an enormous amount of work to strengthen the international position of the USSR. Back in the 1920s, the Soviet Union managed to normalise relations with almost all the neighbouring states through all kinds of treaties. Diplomatic relations were established with all the Great Powers, except the U.S.... The changes in the alignment of forces of the imperialist powers by the

early 1930s presented further opportunities for more vigorous Soviet diplomatic activity.

With the Soviet Union having become one of the world's strongest nations, a number of capitalist countries had to revise much of their earlier policies towards it. While in earlier days, back in the 1920s, the imperialist powers often attempted to settle various international issues without the USSR and contrary to its interest, now more and more nations, also facing a threat from aggressors, were coming to look at the Soviet Union as a nation capable of making a sizeable contribution towards strengthening peace and international security.

The resurgence of aggressive German imperialism and its plans to redraw the map of Europe and of the rest of the world could not but provoke some grave concern in France and, along with that, some of the well-known changes in her foreign policy. The most striking indication of those changes was the revision of the position France held in respect of a non-aggression treaty with the USSR. While in previous years, France had repeatedly declined the relevant proposals of the Soviet government, in 1931 she declared herself willing to conclude such a treaty with the USSR. In 1932 the Soviet government succeeded in concluding non-aggression pacts not only with France, but also with Poland, Latvia, Estonia and Finland which took France's stand on the matter as their guide.

The Soviet-French treaty of non-aggression provided the ground for the subsequent improvement of relations between the two countries. The re-emergence of a danger of aggression from Germany brought with it some objective premises for co-operation between the USSR and France in action to keep the peace in Europe. The Soviet government clearly saw the danger from Nazi Germany that was hanging over Europe.

The Nazi Reich, possessing fairly large economic and manpower resources, could create large armed forces in a matter of years and begin to carry out its foreign policy programme of aggrandizement. The danger of war in case of a fusion of the forces of the aggressor powers would have been particularly great.

The Soviet government was consistently and tirelessly pressing for effective measures to deter the aggressors. It found it necessary to raise a reliable barrier in the way of

the aggressors, rallying together the forces of the nations that wanted to prevent war.

Certain possibilities for a collective peace-keeping front to be formed in Europe did exist. But those possibilities had to be translated into a reality.

Indivisibility of Peace

The Soviet government, considering it necessary to nip the aggression in the bud, put forward the principle of "indivisibility of peace". It proceeded from the assumption that it was easier to prevent a fire than to put it out, or the more so when it would have engulfed many countries, if not entire continents. It was the maintenance of world peace that served best to ensure the peace of every particular country, that of the Soviet Union, among them.

Had it proved possible to stamp out the hotbeds of war in Europe and in the Far East as soon as they had emerged, and to curb the German and Japanese aggressors, the Soviet Union would not have had to fear their attack. That would have been an optimal course of events for the USSR, and the best guarantee of its security. It would have been entirely different if the aggressors, taking advantage of the lack of co-operation between the non-aggressor nations, would have overrun them one by one, thereby building up their own forces. Such a course of events would have contradicted the vital interests of the people of all nations, including the USSR. So the principle of indivisible peace responded to the interests of all nations under a threat of attack.

While on this subject, one cannot fail to mention that historical publications in Western countries have given much currency to the argument that the Soviet Union dreamed of a war between the two imperialist alignments.⁶⁸ The earlier account of the Soviet Union's attitude to war as well as the Soviet policy based on the principle of indivisible peace show such contentions to be utterly baseless.

Soviet diplomacy produced a series of specific proposals for strengthening peace and security.

Definition of Aggression

To lay down well-defined and clear-cut standards of reference to identify aggression was a matter of great importance. Therefore, on February 6, 1933, the Soviet government

brought before the Geneva Disarmament Conference a draft declaration to identify the attacking side. To work out generally acceptable principles to define aggression was of great importance, above all, to the nations facing an immediate threat of attack. The aggressor countries were seeking all kinds of excuses to justify their attack on other states. To have accepted the Soviet-proposed definition of aggression would have made it impossible for an attack on other nations to be justified by any excuse and easier to identify the guilty party promptly and properly in the event of an armed conflict, and, thereby, to apply the necessary joint measures against the aggression. The Soviet draft was examined by the Security Committee of the Disarmament Conference and approved by it with some amendments.⁶⁹

However, when the Soviet draft declaration was referred to the General Commission of the Conference, it became obvious that its passage was being dragged out. Some imperialist powers did not conceal that they found this definition of aggression "inconvenient" and "embarrassing". Reporting to Moscow on March 11, 1933, on the consideration of the Soviet proposal, the Soviet representative at the Conference V. S. Dovgalevsky wrote that it had been supported by the delegates of France, of the Little Entente, Scandinavian and some other states. But other imperialist powers—Germany, Italy, Japan, the U.S. and Britain took up a different stance.⁷⁰ Britain's position, which was presented by Anthony Eden, was particularly negative.

Under the circumstances, the Soviet government decided to press for the acceptance of its proposal in a different way. On April 19, Litvinov, on instructions from the Soviet government, handed to the Polish Minister in Moscow Juliusz Lukaszewicz, the proposal to call a conference so as to sign the protocol on the definition of aggression between the USSR and the nations of the Eastern Europe which had concluded non-aggression pacts with the Soviet Union. The People's Commissar said that such a protocol would strengthen mutual confidence between the nations of Eastern Europe. It would be a reassuring factor in the "troubled international situation" and would likewise stimulate the acceptance of the definition of aggression by other states.⁷¹ The Polish government, however, took a negative line on this question, thus frustrating the proposed conference.

Taking advantage of the arrival of representatives of all

neighbouring states in London in June 1933 (for the economic conference which was meeting there) Litvinov called on them to sign a convention about the definition of aggression right there, in London. The People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs cabled to the People's Commissar to say that "we are most of all interested in a pact with adjacent countries, including Poland and Finland".⁷² However, Poland continued to stick to her earlier negative position at these negotiations. Poland's representatives were trying in every way to play down the importance of such an agreement and, among other things, to limit the range of its signatories. The Polish envoy in Britain E. Raczynski declared, on behalf of his government that Poland agreed to sign only such a convention about the definition of aggression as would include only the neighbours of the USSR, without any other nations having the right to accede to it. That meant ruling out the possibility of Lithuania, Czechoslovakia and other countries ever joining the convention although they had already declared themselves willing to sign it. As a result, the talks to sign the convention were dragged out.

The Polish government also objected to the convention remaining open to China and Japan, although they were the neighbours of the USSR. Even the Romanian representative at the talks N. Titulescu stated that "Poland is telling by her behaviour to the whole world that she does not want any peace between the USSR and Japan".⁷³

The government of Finland was also dragging its feet in defining its attitude to the Soviet proposal, producing all kinds of reservations, including the one about its right to withdraw from the convention at any moment. Germany and Britain were also opposing the signing of the convention.

Yet the Soviet government's efforts had their effect. On July 3, 1933, the convention on the definition of aggression was signed by the USSR, Estonia, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan. A similar convention, comprising the USSR, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Turkey and Yugoslavia, and open to any other nation, was signed on July 4, and a convention between the USSR and Lithuania was signed on July 5; Finland subscribed to the convention on July 22.

The conclusion of that convention was a tangible contribution towards opposing aggression and working out international legal principles designed to help prevent aggression.

The definition of aggression contained in the convention has since been widely used in international law. At the same time, that convention, signed by a number of countries of Eastern Europe, was a kind of counterweight of the Four Power Pact which the ruling quarters of the Western powers had at one time tried to set up.

Litvinov told the World Economic Conference in London that the USSR, consistently abiding by the principle of peaceful coexistence, was willing to develop its relations with all nations, guided by this principle.⁷⁴ The British *Spectator* stated with full reason on July 14, 1933, that the creation of a system of treaties about the definition of aggression was a great success for Soviet diplomacy and a logical upshot of the Soviet Union's policy of peaceful coexistence.

The Soviet government brought before the World Economic Conference a thoroughly drafted proposal to sign a protocol on economic non-aggression. Under the Soviet draft, all the parties to the protocol were to abide in their policies by the principle of peaceful coexistence of nations irrespective of their social and political systems. They were to renounce discrimination of every shape or form in their economic relations with each other.⁷⁵ However, representatives of a number of powers, opposed to the Soviet proposal regarding the definition of aggression, did not want to accept the proposal about economic non-aggression either.

Belated Recognition

The normalisation of Soviet-American relations was one of the major problems of Soviet foreign policy. Describing U.S. policy, Litvinov said at a session of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR that America had for many years "carried on the war declared by the capitalist world after the October Revolution against the new Soviet system of state aiming to create a socialist society. That was a war against the peaceful coexistence of the two systems".⁷⁶ The growing intensity of American-Japanese contradictions in Asia and in the Pacific and the increased danger of an armed conflict between Japan and the U.S. compelled the American ruling circles, however, to change their attitude to the USSR. Some convincing arguments in favour of diplomatic relations with the USSR were produced by the American *Nation* magazine: "The Russian issue is very real

today, and must be faced immediately ... recognition already means more to the United States than to the Soviet Union. ... Mr. Hoover's attitude on Russia has jeopardized the position of the United States in the Pacific area, where the fate of nations may be decided during the next decade. If his policy is not quickly reversed, the loss may be irretrievable. ... Now America needs Russia's aid in the Pacific."⁷⁷

The absence of any contact with the USSR in international affairs could not but weaken the U.S. position in front of Japan. This issue gave rise to a good deal of controversy in the U.S. ruling circles. It was summed up most clearly by the *Washington Post* on December 30, 1933: the basic argument in favour of recognition is that a strong Russia would be an effective counterweight to Japan in East Asia and would, therefore, lessen the danger of war between Japan and the U.S. The strongest argument against recognition is that it would strengthen Russia and in that way help her preach Communism of which she is the birthplace.

Large sections of American opinion, including influential industrial and commercial quarters interested in expanding economic links with the Soviet Union were pressing hard for diplomatic relations to be opened with the USSR.

At the same time, there were still quite influential forces at work in the U.S. against the recognition of the USSR. When Secretary of State Henry Stimson was advised in 1932 to meet the Soviet delegate at the Disarmament Conference, he, raising his hands, exclaimed: "Never, never! It will be centuries before America recognises the Soviet Union". As Henry Morgenthau, who was then in the U.S. government, pointed out in his reminiscences: "The State Department in 1933, frankly, was unsympathetic, if not hostile to the whole idea of opening relations with the Soviet Union"⁷⁸

Franklin D. Roosevelt, who became U.S. President early in 1933, found it right and proper to take the initiative in normalising relations with the Soviet Union. The basic factor that made it imperative for the United States and, especially at that particular moment, to change its mind about opening relations with the USSR, was the threat to U.S. interests from Japanese aggressors in the Far East.*

* The first Soviet Ambassador in Washington A. A. Troyanovsky subsequently pointed out in a letter to Moscow that the main factor

The consistently peace-seeking character of Soviet foreign policy and the Soviet Union's increasingly active involvement in the resolution of pressing international problems, including its readiness to make a sizable contribution towards combating aggressors, and the rapid growth of the Soviet Union's strength and international prestige played an important part in compelling the ruling circles of the United States to decide that they had to co-operate with the USSR. Information about the importance the U.S. was attaching to relations with the USSR appeared in the American press over and over again. The *New York Times* stated in January 1933 that relations between the U.S. and Japan were extremely strained. The policy of non-recognition of the USSR drastically weakened the U.S. position in the Far East. The League of Nations and the U.S. would not be in a position to establish a proper relationship with Japan if they maintained a hostile attitude towards the Soviet Union which was the third side to the Pacific triangle.

On May 16, 1933, two months after it came into office, the new American government established its first direct contact with the USSR. On that day, Franklin Roosevelt sent his messages to the 53 heads of state participating in the World Economic Conference in London, and the Disarmament Conference in Geneva, including the Chairman of the All-Russia Central Executive Committee M. I. Kalinin. Urging specific moves to strengthen peace, the U.S. President called for all nations to conclude a non-aggression pact between them. Kalinin's message in reply to Roosevelt, which was sent three days later, contained a brief account of the Soviet Union's consistent action for peace and disarmament. "The Soviet Government", the message said, "has concluded non-aggression pacts with most of the nations it has official relations with and it cannot but welcome your that had prompted Roosevelt to recognise the USSR was the aggravation of relations between the U.S. and Japan (USSR FPA, s. 05, r. 14, f. 79, pp. 81-82). The American Ambassador to the USSR W. Bullitt, who was Roosevelt's closest adviser on relations with the USSR in 1933, also said that the U.S. had recognised the USSR out of political considerations arising from the situation in the Far East (USSR FPA, s. 05, r. 14, f. 80, pp. 69-75). The following events showed how essential that factor was for the U.S.: only eight years later (in December 1941) the U.S. was openly attacked by Japan, thus being plunged into a bitter armed struggle for domination of the Pacific, which was part and parcel of World War II.

proposal for concluding a non-aggression pact by all nations." 79

Considering that certain powers, above all Japan and Germany, were harbouring land-grabbing plans, there was no prospect, however, for Roosevelt's offer coming to fruition.

Roosevelt's message had no tangible effect either for concluding a general non-aggression treaty, with the USSR and the U.S. among the parties to it, or for direct contact being established between the two countries in international affairs.

On October 10, Roosevelt sent a second message to Kalinin to say that he thought it desirable to put an end to the "abnormal situation" between the U.S. and the USSR. He expressed his readiness to discuss the matter with a representative of the Soviet government. Replying, Kalinin pointed out that the abnormal state of relations between the two countries had an ill effect on the overall international situation, impeding the consolidation of peace and encouraging the aggressors. The message said that Litvinov had been appointed to represent the Soviet government in the talks with Roosevelt.⁸⁰

The exchange of messages between Roosevelt and Kalinin fetched a widespread response. The Soviet press noted with satisfaction that this meant putting an end to the 16-year-old period of non-recognition of the USSR by the United States of America. On October 21, *Pravda* said in a leading article that the Soviet Union occupied too prominent a position in the world for it to be any longer ignored by other countries "without doing damage to themselves". The American press highlighted the positive effect which the normalisation of Soviet-American relations might have on the situation in the Far East. For example, the *New York American* newspaper wrote on September 27 that if Japan ever intended to establish her domination of the Pacific, violate American rights or threaten American territory on the islands or in the continent, America would have an ally, or at least, a friend in the person of Russia. The *San Francisco Chronicle* pointed out on October 21 that it was, above all, the situation in the Far East that had prompted Roosevelt to take that step.

Isolated voices of American opponents of establishing relations with the USSR were drowned in a loud chorus of those who favoured a change of the United States' earlier

manifestly bankrupt policy towards the Soviet Union.

As a result of Litvinov's talks with Roosevelt, there was an exchange of notes in Washington on November 16, 1933, formalising the establishment of diplomatic relations between the USSR and the U.S. The notes recorded the hope that relations between the two nations would forever remain normal and friendly and that the two nations "henceforth may co-operate for their mutual benefit and for the preservation of the peace of the world".⁸¹

For the United States to establish diplomatic relations with the USSR meant admitting the failure of its policy of ignoring the world's first socialist state. So farsighted a politician as Roosevelt could not have failed to take steps towards ending the abnormal situation that existed at the time, and revise U.S. policy regarding the Soviet Union. "It is necessary to do justice to President Roosevelt's farsighted approach", Litvinov said, "because soon after taking office or, perhaps, even before that, he saw the futility of any further action against us for the sake of capitalism, and the benefit of relations with us for the sake of American national interests and those of international peace."⁸²

The Report of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks) to the Seventeenth Party Congress described the establishment of diplomatic relations with the U.S. as an essential achievement of the Soviet policy of peace. "There can be no doubt", J. V. Stalin said in the Report, "that this act is one of most serious importance in the entire system of international relations. The point is that it does not only serve to increase the chances of peace-keeping, improve relations between the two countries, strengthen trading links between them and create a base for mutual co-operation. It is a landmark between the old times when the U.S. was seen in different countries as a base of support for all kinds of anti-Soviet trends, and the new times when this base has been removed by its own good will from the way to the mutual advantage of both nations."⁸³

Pacific Pact Drafted

With the establishment of Soviet-American diplomatic relations, the USSR sought to invite the U.S. to play its part in stabilising the situation in the Far East. The Soviet government considered it necessary to conclude a Paci-

fic pact to this end. It took into account the fact that the consolidation of peace in the Far East would create optimal conditions for the maintenance of peace in Europe, and, conversely, a war in the Far East would rouse other aggressor powers to action as well.

The People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs stressed in a conversation with French statesmen on July 6, 1933 that "if one wants peace in Europe, one cannot stand by looking indifferently at the events in Asia" since any conflict in the Far East can be used by Germany and some other countries "in order to create difficulties in Europe."⁸⁴

The Soviet Union, on its part, held a firm position with regard to the aggressive plans and ambitions of the Japanese militarists.

The Soviet government took into account the fact that the Japanese war party was guiding itself with increasing evidence towards a "prospect for a preventive war against the Soviet Union". "In the face of such a situation, our policy," the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs wrote to the Soviet Ambassador in Japan, K. K. Yurenev on September 17, 1933, "while keeping up our basic commitment to peace, cannot be one of concessions and favours to Japanese militarists or one of ignoring the acts of provocation and outrage which the Japanese government is indulging in. We are projecting and pursuing a firm line of resisting Japanese importunities. . . ." Such a line follows from the assumption, the letter pointed out, that "we can offer quite effective resistance if the worst comes to the worst, that is, if Japanese militarists really tried to attack the Soviet Union. Because of the measures we have taken in the last two years or so, we do not find ourselves by any means defenceless in case of the enemy's attempt to put us on our mettle."⁸⁵

In the Far East Japan, as stated earlier on, threatened not only the Soviet Union, but the U.S. interest as well. Roosevelt did not conceal in his conversations with Litvinov in Washington, during the talks about the establishment of diplomatic relations, that America was seriously concerned over the aggressiveness of the Japanese militarists. In that connection, the Soviet representative suggested that it would be expedient to have a Pacific non-aggression pact concluded by the USSR, the U.S., China and Japan, but Roosevelt limited himself to instructing Bullitt to deal with the matter and report to him.

The People's Commissar suggested during the conversations with the U.S. President that the USSR and the U.S. could likewise conclude an agreement on joint action to meet a threat to peace. However, President Roosevelt declared that he preferred to make unilateral declarations whenever necessary. So, the U.S. gave no support either to that far-reaching Soviet proposal which, if accepted by the U.S., could have changed the worsening international situation for the better.

So these facts indicate that the Soviet government was ready and willing to establish active co-operation with the U.S. in opposing Japanese aggression, but the U.S. government did not intend to take really effective steps against the aggressors at the time, and hoped that Japan would begin by going to war against the USSR, and that would make the U.S. position easier. The American journalist Knickerboker who had close contact with Bullitt and other influential American officials, told a Soviet diplomat in Berlin in November 1933 that the U.S. did not contemplate effective co-operation with the USSR in opposing Japanese aggression. That was due, in part, to a fear of an eventual full victory of the USSR over Japan and a revolutionary outburst in Japan and China.⁸⁶

In the very first conversation with the U.S. Ambassador in Moscow, Bullitt on December 11, 1933, the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, speaking on behalf of the Soviet government, reiterated the Soviet proposals for concluding a Pacific Pact and for possible co-operation between the USSR and the U.S. to meet a threat of war. However, Bullitt passed it over. Two days later the same issues were discussed between Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs L. M. Karakhan and Bullitt. Recording the U.S. Ambassador's remarks in his transcript, Karakhan pointed out that one could guess from Bullitt's words that a study of the question of a Pacific Pact in Washington had led to "negative conclusions". A few days later Bullitt told the People's Commissar that he foresaw "great difficulties" about the matter. The Soviet government still considered it necessary to press for the conclusion of the Pacific Pact. Troyanovsky, appointed as Soviet Ambassador to the U.S. in December 1933, was instructed to "uphold the desirability of the proposal for a non-aggression pact to be concluded between the USSR, the U.S., Japan and China."⁸⁷

On February 23, 1934, Troyanovsky was received by President Roosevelt. The Soviet Ambassador said that it was desirable for the USSR and the U.S. to co-operate in opposing Japanese aggression. He pointed out that "it will not be an easy thing to deter Japan and get her to reduce her appetites. Japan will not listen either to America or to the USSR separately, but she will listen to them both even at the eleventh hour, that is why we must be in contact."⁸⁸ Roosevelt, however, dodged the subject. The issue of the Pacific Pact was once more raised by Litvinov with Bullitt in March 1934 after the U.S. Ambassador returned from a trip to the U.S. However, Bullitt "has not given a reasonable answer".⁸⁹

By the spring of 1934 it had become obvious that Japan did not yet consider herself sufficiently prepared for war against the Soviet Union. That was indicated, for example, by the fact that the Japanese government had chosen China as the main target of her further aggression. On April 17, 1934, it published a statement clearly indicative of her intention to establish her control over all of China to the extent of crowding out Britain, France and the U.S. In that connection, the Soviet Embassy in London pointed out in a letter of May 11, 1934, to the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs that, as British political circles believed, the general strengthening of the USSR, its achievement in international affairs, and the defence measures it was taking in the Far East, above all, its powerful Air Force capable of wiping out Japan's major centres in a matter of hours, all those facts persuaded the Japanese ruling establishment that to attack the Soviet Union under those objective circumstances would be a rather risky enterprise.⁹⁰

Although the immediate danger of Japan attacking the USSR was no longer there, the Soviet Union went on pressing for the Pacific Pact to be concluded. On May 13, 1934, Litvinov told W. Bullitt that so long as the U.S. and Britain stuck to their policies in the Far East, Japan could do whatever she pleased. "The only effective method of restricting the Japanese is to arrange at once joint action by all powers having interest in the Pacific."⁹¹

However, the U.S. government did not support the Soviet proposals for strengthening peace in the Far East, while keeping up its policy of abetting Japanese aggression.

The British government considered concluding a bilateral

treaty of non-aggression with Japan so as, by ensuring its self-seeking interests in the Far East, to push Japan into armed action against the USSR. It was Chamberlain acting for Premier Baldwin while he was on leave, who took the initiative on September 1, 1934. Even some of the Foreign Office staff had serious doubts about the expediency of such a move. The Chief of the Far Eastern Department, Orde, pointed out in his memorandum on the subject that such a pact "will surely bring nearer the day when she will attack Russia". However, Japan's aggressive ambitions were directed not only against Russia and so it was "after a successful settling of accounts with Russia and a pause for recovery that Japan may become a real danger to our own possessions in the Far East."⁹² The British ambassador to Japan was instructed to find out the price Japan was ready to pay in return for Britain's consent to conclude a pact that was of so much benefit to Japan. Chamberlain and Simon took up the cudgels for a pact with Japan.⁹³ However, because of the impending talks with Japan on matters arising from her reluctance to prolong the existing agreements about the balance of the naval forces of the imperialist powers, the negotiations with her on that subject were adjourned.

For Peace in the Baltic

It was a matter of particular concern to Soviet diplomacy to resolve the problems of Northeast Europe, to ensure peace and security in that region because the capture of the Baltic states by the Nazi Reich or the establishment of German domination over them by any other means was bound to spell the most immediate danger to the Soviet Union.

Until 1917, the Baltic states had formed part of Russia. Following the victory of the Great October Socialist Revolution, Soviet government was established also in the Baltic states but it was brought down through foreign armed intervention (German, above all). The Soviet government agreed in 1920 to conclude peace treaties with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and to recognise them on the understanding that they would allow no foreign military presence on their territory.⁹⁴ The USSR had unfailingly attached tremendous importance ever since to having this provision of the peace treaties complied with.

The Soviet Union put forward a series of most important

specific proposals which, once carried out, could have ensured the maintenance of peace in Eastern Europe, including the Baltic states. The general idea behind all of them was to unite and rally the forces of East European nations under threat of aggression from Hitler Germany. "The organisers of anti-Soviet intervention", *Izvestia* pointed out on October 15, 1933, "have always regarded the Baltic states as springboards for attacking the Soviet Union. The present trumpeters of German nazism are looking at them in exactly the same way. . . That is why the Soviet Union cannot, of course, remain indifferent in the face of intensified Nazi activities in the Baltic states."

In a conversation with the Latvian Minister in Moscow, on December 11, the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs stressed that the USSR was very closely watching the course of events in the Baltic states and that in all international negotiations Soviet diplomats kept those states in mind, and that the Soviet Union would "always do its best to act in common with them". The Minister expressed his gratitude for the Soviet stand.⁹⁵

The USSR attached no less importance to preserving the independence and inviolability of Poland and preventing German aggression against her. Had the aggressive plans of Hitler Germany in relation to the Baltic states and Poland been thwarted and had those states become parties to a collective security system to oppose German aggression, no Nazi forces would ever have gained an access to the Soviet borders.

Realising the sharply intensified danger across Poland's Western frontiers upon the advent of Nazis to power in Germany, the Polish government also began to show interest in a certain improvement of relations with the USSR in 1933. True, by the end of 1933, the Nazis were reported to be seeking an amicable agreement with Poland's reactionaries headed by Pilsudski, so as to make it harder for all the nations of Europe, threatened by aggression from the Nazi Reich, to unite and rally together.

On December 14, 1933, the USSR informed Poland of its proposal to publish a joint Soviet-Polish declaration stating their adamant determination to safeguard and defend peace in Eastern Europe. In the event of a threat to the Baltic states, the USSR and Poland, under that draft declaration, undertook to consider the situation.⁹⁶

Since the USSR and Poland were two largest nations of Eastern Europe, the publication of such a declaration would have had tremendous positive importance for peace in this region. The idea behind the Soviet proposal was to give the Baltic states under a threat of German aggression a sense of confidence in their own strength and stiffen their resistance to German expansionism; to reduce the force of Germany's pressure on the Baltic states; lay a material base for negotiations between representatives of Poland and the USSR about co-operation in promoting peace. Although Germany was not mentioned in the Soviet proposal, it did imply action against the threat to the Baltic states from the Nazi Reich. Should Poland have accepted the Soviet proposal, that would have been a warning to Germany and would have deterred her acts of aggression against the Baltic states.⁹⁷

True, the Polish government announced that it was not opposed, in principle, to considering the Soviet proposal,⁹⁸ but it was not its intention to put it into practice. The Polish reactionary ruling quarters did not want any co-operation with the USSR. While planning to create a "Greater Poland", they had chosen to co-operate with the Nazi Reich and other aggressors in the hope that they could carry out their plans of aggrandizement, above all, at the expense of the Soviet Union.

The Nazis decided to exploit the mood of Polish governing circles to further their own interests. Above all, they strove to prevent the projected rallying of the nations of Europe in opposition to the expansionist ambitions of German imperialism. The Nazis told the Poles that they were prepared to pledge non-aggression and broached the subject of co-operation between Germany and Poland in seizing some of Soviet land and sharing the Baltic states between them. The Polish rulers were delighted by the offer. Pilsudski, talking to Hitler's emissary Rauschning on December 11, 1933, suggested an alliance between Germany and Poland, pointing to the inevitable prospect of war between them and the USSR.⁹⁹

A German-Polish declaration of friendship and non-aggression was published on January 26, 1934.

By that declaration the Nazis, with Pilsudski's men aiding them, raised serious obstacles in the way of establishing a front to defend peace in Europe and drove a wedge

between the nations objectively interested in resisting Nazi aggression. Poland had virtually broken with the bloc of nations created by France in the 1920s and was actually becoming an element of the aggressive bloc of fascist powers. The declaration gave rise to the closest ever co-operation between Poland and Germany.

All the assurances of the Nazis to the effect that they had no aggressive plans whatsoever against Poland were perfidious in their character, of course. Poland still remained among the first few countries the Nazis planned to include in the German "living space". It was for that reason, as evidenced by the documents of the German Ministry for Foreign Affairs then published, that the Nazis decided to limit themselves to signing a joint German-Polish declaration rather than a non-aggression pact as was usually done in such cases. The Nazis acted on the assumption that the declaration would subsequently be easier to break than a treaty. At the same time, the declaration avoided the question of Germany recognising the existing German-Polish frontier and contained nothing beyond an obligation to resolve all issues in dispute without resort to force. Soon after the declaration was signed, Hitler told his closest associates that "all the agreements with Poland are transitory".¹⁰⁰

Referring to the lessons of German-Polish relations, the Foreign Minister of Romania, Gafencu subsequently remarked with good reason that Hitler's assurances, when he gave them, "hound the assured, not himself".¹⁰¹

What claimed attention, besides, was the absence of a provision, common to agreements of this kind, that in the event of an attack by one of the parties to the declaration against a third state, the other party had the right to consider it null and void. That meant, for instance, that in the event of a German attack on Austria, Poland was to keep out.

Following the publication of the Polish-German declaration of non-aggression, the Polish government no longer found it necessary to conduct any negotiations with the USSR about co-operation in opposing German aggression. On February 3, 1934, it informed the Soviet government that it considered the issue of a Soviet-Polish declaration to have lapsed.¹⁰²

Representatives of the Polish government asserted in

their foreign policy statements that they adhered to an "even-handed" approach in relations with Poland's two great neighbours—Germany and the USSR. In actual fact, however, such statements were no more than diplomatic cover for the actual course of Polish foreign policy, that is, the course towards closer dealings with Hitler Germany on an anti-Soviet ground.

A Standing Peace Conference Proposed

The Disarmament Conference resumed in May 1934. However, after Germany had declared back on October 14, 1933, that she would no longer attend the conference and set about feverishly rearming herself, the efforts to draw up a convention on arms limitation turned out to have been finally wrecked. "The conference on disarmament", Lloyd George wrote, "will soon be put from hospital bed to death bed".¹⁰³

Speaking at a meeting of the General Commission of the Disarmament Conference on May 29, Litvinov suggested that the conference might look for some other guarantees of peace (in addition to disarmament). The People's Commissar pointed out in that connection the possibility of sanctions being applied against peace breakers as well as of European and regional pacts on mutual aid in action against aggression. He went on to set out a proposal by the Soviet government to transform the Disarmament Conference into a standing Peace Conference which would be averting the outbreak of war, seeing to the security of all nations and universal peace, working out, amplifying and improving the methods of promoting security and responding in good time to the warnings about a war danger and to the appeals for aid to the nations in danger and "lending well-timed possible assistance to them, whether moral, economic, financial or of any other kind".¹⁰⁴

Objecting to the Soviet proposal, the British Foreign Secretary John Simon declared that Britain did not want the Disarmament conference transformed into a security conference. The Soviet proposal was, however, seconded by France and a number of other states. On June 8, it was decided to refer it to the governments of all nations.

In that connection the People's Commissariat for Foreign

Affairs sent a letter to the Soviet Ambassador in the United States giving a detailed motivation of the Soviet proposal as well as the draft statute of a standing Peace Conference. The Ambassador was instructed to explain to the Americans the aims the Soviet government pursued by its proposal. The letter stressed, in particular, that since with the disarmament conference adjourned, there was no more ground for co-operation between the members of the League of Nations and the U.S. in matters of peace keeping, the standing Peace Conference would again "create the possibility for such permanent co-operation..." It goes without saying, the letter said, that in the face of an absolutely negative U.S. attitude to the whole idea, the Soviet Union would hardly do as much as table its draft in the League of Nations, "because America's co-operation is one of the main objects pursued by us",¹⁰⁵

On receiving this letter, the Soviet Chargé d'Affaires B. Y. Skvirsky talked the matter over with U.S. Secretary of State Cordell Hull who declared that "he cannot bind himself by a definite position for or against the draft" explaining this by saying that the U.S. was careful about the possibility of being involved in an international political organisation.¹⁰⁶ Hull's answer, in fact, meant that the U.S. rejected the Soviet proposal. It was impossible under the circumstances to bring it to fruition.

Churchill wrote, regarding the role the U.S. could have played in safeguarding peace, that "if the influence of the United States had been exerted it might have galvanised the French and British politicians into action. The League of Nations, battered though it had been, was still an august instrument which would have invested any challenge to the new Hitler war menace with the sanction of international law. Under the strain the Americans merely shrugged their shoulders."¹⁰⁷ The United States, joining Britain and France in abetting aggression, had made impossible a rallying of the forces which could have barred the way to aggression.

EASTERN PACT NEGOTIATED. TREATY OF MUTUAL ASSISTANCE BETWEEN THE USSR AND FRANCE

Soviet Initiative Towards a Regional Pact

The talks which began late in 1933, on the Soviet government's initiative, for concluding a regional pact to safeguard the security of the nations of Eastern and Central Europe, occupy a special place in the history of the Soviet efforts for peace and against aggression. "The Soviet Union is interested in strengthening peace everywhere", *Izvestia* wrote on January 29, 1934, "for, with international relations strained as they are, an armed clash between the Great Powers, wherever it may break out, would tend to escalate into a world war. More particularly the USSR is interested in the maintenance of peace in Eastern Europe."

The Soviet government did a lot towards strengthening peace on the Soviet borders. It had concluded non-aggression treaties with many nations. That meant that all of them recognised peaceful coexistence as basic to their relations with the USSR. The signing of agreements about the definition of aggression and a number of other measures went far towards promoting the cause of peace.

However, at a time when certain powers were already heading for aggression, measures of that kind were not enough to keep the peace. The aggressors were in no mood to reckon with any treaties or any standards of international relations. They were intent on using force to carry out their plans and were preparing for war. It was senseless to try and admonish them by any peace offers or appeals for peaceful coexistence.

There had to be a different kind of action, the action that could ensure peace and security in spite of the aggressors' plans. Aggressors based their policies on the use of force,¹⁰⁸ and they did not reckon with the interests of other nations unless these had a requisite force behind them. Nazi Germany, using her economic potential, was quickly building up the strength of her war machine as well, developing into the mightiest state of capitalist Europe. With her predatory foreign policy, she became a formidable threat to many

nations of Europe. What made matters still worse was the emergence of a bloc of aggressor powers, comprising Germany, Japan, Italy and some other countries.

The only way to keep the peace in Europe was for all the nations facing the danger of aggression to rally together in order to counter the aggressors with a still greater, overwhelming force. That could be achieved by the conclusion of bilateral or multilateral treaties of mutual assistance by the states under a threat of attack, and by setting up an effective system of collective security in Europe.

That was *the course to take if war was to be prevented*. The Soviet proposal for concluding a regional pact met in equal measure the interests of peoples of the USSR and of the other countries of Europe. That is exactly why it had fetched widespread response at the time, being for long in the limelight of European diplomacy and public opinion.

The Soviet government found that with German imperialism on course for aggression once again, it was a matter of particular importance for the USSR and France to establish close co-operation in action to keep the peace.

During his visit to Paris, Litvinov pointed out in a statement to the French press on July 7, 1933: "Neither our political, nor our economic interests clash with the interests of France in any point of the globe, and, therefore, there are no obstacles, in our view, to our closer co-operation, both political and economic." The People's Commissar stated with satisfaction that the Soviet Union's peace policy was winning more and more understanding in France.¹⁰⁹

In a conversation with the prominent French politician Edouard Herriot, who was in the Soviet Union in August and September 1933, Litvinov spoke about the firm determination and desire of the USSR to "seek closer contact with France".¹¹⁰ The Soviet government proposed a gentleman's agreement about an exchange of information as a step towards it.

The French people felt deeply concerned over their destiny. The grave danger hanging over France was clearly sensed by her most far-sighted politicians as well.

Besides, the French system of alliances with Poland and some other states of Central and Eastern Europe was gradually losing its earlier import because as the alignment of forces in Europe changed, so did their foreign policy orientation. The French government's attempts to come

to terms with Nazi Germany, notably at the expense of the small nations of Central and Eastern Europe, also greatly undermined relations of those countries with France and their confidence in her.

At the same time, the rapid economic growth of the USSR and the enhancement of its defence capability led to it being considered in France as a possible partner in opposing the danger of Nazi aggression. In the context of a deep economic crisis, the interests of the French business community in increased trading links with the USSR was likewise a matter of no mean importance.

However, there were quite a few personalities in France's ruling circles who were in favour of co-operation with Nazi Germany. Foreign Minister J. Paul-Boncour admitted in a conversation with the Soviet Ambassador V. S. Dvoglinsky on November 22, 1933, that "there are influential political, commercial and industrial circles in France seeking an accommodation with Germany". He remarked that but for his opposition, "Daladier would already be conducting direct negotiations with Germany."¹¹¹

The French government, having overcome the waverings due to the fierce resistance of reactionary elements which wanted no trucks with the Soviet Union, finally arrived at the conclusion that there had to be co-operation with the USSR in action against Nazi aggression. With Germany having left the League of Nations and walked out of the Disarmament Conference, Paul-Boncour, talking to the Soviet Ambassador Dvoglinsky, pointed out, referring to appropriate statements by certain Soviet diplomats, that the question of supplementing the 1932 Soviet-French non-aggression pact with a pact of mutual assistance might come up, indeed, in due course. In a conversation with Litvinov in Paris on October 31, J. Paul-Boncour "mentioned several times mutual assistance as complementing the non-aggression pact". It was he, too, who raised the question of the USSR joining the League of Nations.¹¹²

On November 29, 1933, the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs informed the French government that the USSR was willing to consider concluding a treaty of mutual assistance with France and joining the League of Nations. The instruction to the Soviet Ambassador in France was: "You may open your conversations with Boncour on these grounds. Communicate the results." On the following

day Dovgalevsky informed Paul-Boncour about it. Litvinov said in those days: "We have set firm course towards a closer relationship with France."¹¹³ Shortly afterwards Dovgalevsky was summoned to Moscow to be given circumstantial instructions regarding subsequent negotiations with the French government.

While welcoming the French proposals in principle, the Soviet government still considered it more reasonable for safeguarding peace in Europe to conclude not a bilateral Soviet-French treaty but a multilateral agreement on collective security with other nations concerned taking part.

On December 19-20, 1933, the Soviet government drafted the following proposals to be communicated to the French government:

"1) The USSR is willing to join the League of Nations on certain conditions.

2) The USSR does not object to a regional agreement being concluded within the framework of the League of Nations about mutual defence against aggression from Germany.

3) The USSR is willing to see this agreement joined by Belgium, France, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Finland or by some of these countries, with France and Poland in without fail.

4) Negotiations to specify the commitments under a future convention on mutual defence can begin upon the submission of a draft agreement by ... France.

5) Regardless of the obligations under the agreement on mutual defence, the parties to the agreement must undertake to render each other diplomatic, moral and, as far as possible, material aid also in the event of an armed attack not envisaged by the agreement itself. . ."¹¹⁴

The document just quoted contained a brief and concise account of the overriding positions of principle which informed of the struggle the Soviet state had launched against the growing danger of another world war. For this reason it is necessary to take a closer look at some of them.

First, in distinction from the French proposal for a bilateral Soviet-French pact, the Soviet Union was pressing for a wider agreement. The Soviet government considered some action to prevent war and to check the aggressors to be the major task in hand. The Soviet-French treaty about mutual aid in resisting aggression could play a tremendous

part in this respect. But to conclude a multilateral agreement on collective security would have been a matter of far greater importance for ensuring a safe peace in Europe. Should Germany have nevertheless launched the war, she would have had to wage it against all the parties to the pact at once, that is, under extremely unfavourable circumstances.

Second, it is worth looking through the list of nations which were projected as parties to the regional agreement which has gone down in history as the draft Eastern Pact.¹¹⁵ One condition of particular importance in the Soviet proposal was that France and Poland were to have been indispensable parties to this pact.

A word of comment on French participation. The USSR could have assumed contractual obligations regarding aid to the nations listed in its proposal only if France had assumed the same obligations. Otherwise, should France have stayed out in the event of the USSR entering the war against Germany because of her attack upon the Baltic countries, the Soviet Union would virtually have found itself alone in a state of war against the Nazi Reich, while the overriding concern of Soviet foreign policy at the time was to avoid such a war.

The reactionary circles of the Western powers, above all, those of Britain, strained every nerve in those years to provoke war between the USSR and Germany as well as the USSR and Japan. But the Soviet Union was cautious enough not to fall for that kind of provocation. Naturally, the Soviet Union could have come to the aid of a victim of aggression even without having a treaty of mutual assistance with it. It did actually lend such assistance on more than one occasion, as will yet be shown. This assistance has been always provided with due regard for the particular situation and by such means and methods as to keep the USSR from being involved in a war against aggressors in what would have been extremely dangerous and unfavourable circumstances for the USSR, without allies.

It would have been a different matter if France had joined the USSR in helping the victim of aggression, as envisaged in the Soviet proposal. In such a case, there would have been enough ground for expecting that, faced by the prospect of a war against the USSR and France at once, Nazi Germany would not have ventured into acts of aggres-

sion against other parties to the pact. Besides, Germany would have had to reckon with the likelihood that Britain, as France's ally under the Locarno Pact, might also have entered the war, following France. If such an attack had still taken place, the aggressor could have been curbed by the joint efforts of the USSR, France and other parties to the Eastern Pact.

The participation of Poland in the Pact was also a matter of tremendous importance, in point of principle, for the USSR. To begin with, that would have meant that Poland, once actively involved in all anti-Soviet actions of the imperialist camp, would become an ally of the USSR. Besides, it was precisely Poland's participation in the pact that could have made Soviet participation in it really effective, because the Soviet Union had no common border with the Nazi Reich and could seriously consider joining a war against Germany only in close co-operation with Poland, which would have allowed the transit of Soviet troops through some of her territory towards the German borders. The main thing, however, was that a coalition involving the USSR, France and Poland would have virtually deterred the Nazi Reich from venturing into such a war. Also, the guarantee of Poland's continued independence was a matter of great importance, in principle, for the security of the USSR, because as long as there was an independent Poland, Germany could have no convenient access to the Soviet border. Therefore, the USSR was prepared to make its utmost contribution towards safeguarding Poland's independence and inviolability.

With such allies as France and Poland, the Soviet Union would have undertaken to provide assistance to the Baltic countries and other small nations as well. For example, once an ally of France, the USSR would not have objected to having these allied commitments extended to France's allies—Czechoslovakia and Belgium (Poland was likewise in alliance with France). At the same time, the Soviet Union was most interested in having the reciprocal obligations of the parties to the Eastern Pact extended to the Baltic states as well. That was because, having captured the Baltic states, Nazi Germany would have obtained a vantage ground for a subsequent attack against the USSR.

Third, a word of comment about the League of Nations. The institution of the League of Nations was part and par-

cel of the Versailles system of peace treaties created by the Entente Powers and the U.S. as a result of their victory in World War I. It was one of the instruments in the hands of those nations by which to ensure the immutable territorial and political outcome of the victory they had won, and the dominant position of the Anglo-Franco-American imperialist alignment in the world. Along with that, ever since it was founded, the League of Nations had been one of the centres for organising foreign intervention against the Soviet state and other anti-Soviet acts. However, by 1933 the role of the League of Nations within the system of international relations had radically changed. The positions of France and Britain in the world grew weaker, and the League of Nations stopped being an instrument of their domination of other nations. Yet it could still play a certain positive role as one of the means to ensure collective security and to make its contribution towards the struggle against aggression and for the consolidation of peace and international security. For example, Article 16 of the Covenant of the League of Nations stipulated that in the event of aggression by one of its members against any other, all the remaining members were under obligation to apply economic and military sanctions against the aggressor.¹¹⁶

On joining the League of Nations, the Soviet Union was anxious for it to become effective in strengthening peace and security. In the event of an attack against the USSR by any state whatsoever, all other members of the League of Nations were obliged to come to its aid. True, there was no particular reason to hope that the other members of the League would actually render assistance to the USSR. Simultaneously, the USSR came under obligation to render assistance to other members of the League of Nations should they have fallen victim to an act of aggression. The Soviet state was willing, on its part, to join the League of Nations' collective action in providing assistance to a victim of aggression.

That was what made the Soviet Union's accession to the League of Nations worthwhile and possible. The inability of that organisation to take any effective steps against the Japanese aggressors who had invaded Northeast China (Manchuria) in 1931, damaged its prestige. But the entry of the USSR into the League of Nations, prepared to make a tangible contribution towards action against aggression,

could have given it a new lease of life. Therefore, many members of the League of Nations had a stake in Soviet participation.

The question of the USSR joining the League of Nations assumed added relevance because all the allied treaties of France, including the 1925 Treaty of Locarno, were based on the Covenant of the League of Nations. Under those treaties, France could not have lent assistance to the Soviet Union without violating, for instance, the Treaty of Locarno and without a decision by the Council of the League of Nations about the USSR being a victim of aggression. Therefore, for the USSR to join the League of Nations proved to be an indispensable precondition for the conclusion of a treaty of mutual assistance between the USSR and France, as well as of the collective security pact for Europe proposed by the Soviet Union.

Those were the circumstances behind the invitation to the Soviet Union from most of the members of the League of Nations in the autumn of the subsequent year to join that organisation. Once in the League of Nations the Soviet Union became its most consistent champion against aggression and for the maintenance of peace.

Fourth, there is yet another important point to note about the Soviet proposal. It stated that the parties to the agreement should back up one another also in the event of an attack by a state outside the agreement. This point clearly intimated the danger that was facing the Soviet Union at the time from Japan. When France proposed concluding a treaty of mutual assistance with the USSR, the Soviet government asked at once whether France meant mutual assistance in the Far East as well. However, all that the French government was prepared to do in announcing its readiness to conclude a treaty with the USSR was to act against German aggression alone.¹¹⁷ The Soviet government was interested in having certain support, if not outright military assistance, provided in the event of a conflict in the Far East as well. It should be noted at the same time that the very fact of such a pact being concluded even without the above-mentioned provision, would have been of no mean importance for the Soviet Union in the event of a conflict with Japan. For the pact would have been an extra guarantee of peace on the Soviet Western borders which would have enabled the Soviet government to reserve more strength and

give more attention to action against the Far Eastern aggressor.

Speaking at a meeting of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR on December 29, 1933, Litvinov emphasised that "the maintenance of peace cannot depend on our efforts alone and demands co-operation and assistance from other nations". Seeking, therefore, to establish and maintain friendly relations with all nations, the USSR was giving particular attention to strengthening the relations and securing a maximum rapprochement with those of them which, like the Soviet Union, were interested in the preservation of peace and willing to oppose peace breakers. "The Soviet Union, on its part, is ready to accomplish this task because work in this direction is dictated by the interests of the working people of the whole world and by the security of all peoples, including, of course, the peoples of the Soviet Union. The peoples, like ours, who have provided the fullest possible evidence of their commitment to peace and their respect for the security of other nations, have also the fullest possible right to their own security."¹¹⁸

By its proposal for concluding a regional agreement on mutual defence against Nazi aggression, the Soviet government started a new stage of active struggle for peace and security in Europe. Soviet action against aggression, determined and guided by its positions of principle, won widespread recognition and support by the mass of the people in all European countries.

The proposals of the Soviet government were lauded by the Soviet Ambassador in Paris Dvorkin to the French Minister for Foreign Affairs J. Paul-Boncour on December 28, 1933. Having looked them through, the French Minister could not help admitting that they had outstanding importance for the maintenance of peace. "We are undertaking a job of great importance with you, today we have begun making history with you,"¹¹⁹ he told the Soviet Ambassador.

It was not, however, without some hesitation that the French government accepted the proposal submitted by the Soviet government. In spite of the danger hanging over France, that country's reactionary elements still bestially hated the Soviet state and would not hear of any co-operation with it. They hoped to come to terms with the Nazis.

It was not until April 20, 1934, that Louis Barthou (who

succeeded J. Paul-Boncour as Minister for Foreign Affairs in February) informed the Soviet government that he had been authorised to continue the negotiations. Bartbou worked hard, as he usually did, to make the negotiations a success. He understood perfectly well what danger was facing France from Nazi Germany and saw the Soviet Union as the major ally in action to ward it off. At the same time he believed that, should France decline the Soviet proposal, the USSR could find itself forced to take steps to resume such relations with Germany as had existed between the two countries under the terms of the 1922 Treaty of Rapallo. And then Germany would reap the benefit France had rejected.

Late in April 1934 the Secretary General of the French Ministry for Foreign Affairs, A. Léger informed the Soviet Embassy in Paris about the outline (sketch) for the pact proposed by the Soviet Union to be formalised as a treaty. The idea behind that outline was to conclude a multilateral regional pact of mutual assistance (Eastern Pact) with the USSR, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Poland and the Baltic states in it and France out. The parties to the pact were to have pledged non-aggression and mutual assistance in the event of aggression. However, only the neighbouring states were to have afforded mutual assistance under the French scheme.

Another idea was for the USSR and France to conclude a bilateral treaty of mutual assistance associated with the Eastern Pact as well as with the 1925 Pact of Locarno. Under that treaty, France would have afforded assistance to the Soviet Union, had it been attacked by any of the parties to the Eastern Pact; the Soviet Union would have come to France's aid, had she been attacked by one of the Locarno nations.¹²⁰ (Besides France, the parties to the Pact of Locarno were Germany, Britain, Italy and Belgium.)

The outline worked out by the French Foreign Ministry narrowed down the obligations France was to have assumed in accordance with the Soviet proposal; she was committing herself to giving assistance to the USSR only rather than to all the parties to the Eastern Pact. True, France was bound by allied obligations also with Poland and Czechoslovakia under the treaties she had earlier concluded. But in the event of a German attack on Baltic states, France could have stayed out. The Soviet Charge d'Affaires in

France M. J. Rosenberg immediately drew A. Léger's attention to that flaw in the scheme he had proposed. The Secretary General of the French Foreign Ministry replied that the French government could not assume any obligation regarding aid to the Baltic countries.

The draft treaty worked out by the French Foreign Ministry differed from the Soviet proposal also in that it provided for Germany to join the Pact as well. Naturally, such a modification could complicate the negotiations about the Pact right away, but, considering the importance which the French government attached (partly under the influence of Britain and Poland) to Germany being offered to join the Pact, the Soviet government did not object to its proposal being so amended.

In his conversations with Louis Barthou on June 4, 1934, Litvinov reverted to the issue of aid to the Baltic countries. The French Minister found the Soviet arguments convincing, but gave no final answer to them. The draft Eastern Pact was examined on June 5, 1934, at a French Cabinet meeting which approved it in principle.¹²¹ But on the question of guarantees for the Baltic countries, it took up a negative stand. Barthou communicated this decision to the Soviet Foreign Minister on the following day.

The Soviet government continued, however, to insist on French guarantees being extended to the Baltic states and objected to the division of the parties to the Pact into neighbours and non-neighbours since no aid for the latter was envisaged. In the end, the French government recanted such a division but it still refused to commit itself to aiding the Baltic states. With the major issues regarding the conclusion of the Eastern Pact settled between the French and Soviet representatives, it was decided to start negotiations with the governments of other nations which were to join the Pact.

The outline-text of the Pact consisted of a treaty of regional mutual assistance, a treaty between the USSR and France as well as a General Act. It was envisaged that Poland, the USSR, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania would be parties to the treaty of regional mutual assistance. The treaty, apart from committing the parties concerned to aid each other in the event of aggression, provided for their consultations with a view to preventing war or restoring peace. Under the Soviet-French

Treaty, the USSR was to become a guarantor of the 1925 Pact of Locarno, on a par with Britain and Italy. France committed herself to assisting the USSR in the event of an attack against it by any of the parties to the Eastern Pact. Under the General Act, the Eastern Pact was to have come into effect once the USSR joined the League of Nations.

While informing the Soviet ambassadors in the countries concerned about the outline-text of the Pact, the Soviet Foreign People's Commissar emphasised that it was not a draft but a mere outline handed to him by the French in Geneva. In his letter he noted, in particular, that it was worthwhile including a definition of aggression in the regional pact. The People's Commissar took the view that Czechoslovakia, Poland and the Baltic countries, having signed the convention about the definition of aggression, "can hardly object to this amendment. Nor is France likely to oppose it, but Germany must be expected to resist it."¹²²

First of all, France informed Czechoslovakia and Poland about the draft Eastern Pact. On June 6, 1934, the Soviet ambassadors brought the negotiations to the knowledge of the governments of the Baltic countries. On the following day, the proposal for concluding the Eastern Pact was passed on to the German government by the French Ambassador.

Active Soviet efforts for peace and security in Europe had led to a general improvement of Soviet-Czechoslovak as well as Soviet-Romanian relations by that time. In earlier years, the governments of Czechoslovakia and Romania, with such influential leaders as Beneš and Titulescu, invariably held extremely anti-Soviet positions. With the independence of both countries threatened by the Nazi Reich, they had to revise their policies regarding the USSR which was the principal fighter against Hitler aggression. By an exchange of notes on June 9, 1934, the USSR established diplomatic relations with Czechoslovakia and Romania.

On being proposed to conclude the Eastern Pact, the Czechoslovak government immediately announced that it accepted this proposal and was ready to join the Pact, even in the event of Germany opposing it.

Opponents of the Eastern Pact

Poland's position was entirely different. In a conversation with Louis Barthou in Geneva on June 4, 1934, Joseph Beck said he was sceptical of the chances of success for this Pact.¹²³ Litvinov cabled from Geneva on the same day to say that Beck was "against the pacts we have proposed". On June 27, he stated that "Poland is the main hindrance to the realisation of a regional pact".¹²⁴

The Soviet diplomacy did whatever it could to explain to the Polish government the immense importance which the Eastern Pact could have for her independence. *Izvestia* said on July 16, 1934, that the Eastern Pact offered Poland some real guarantees of the security of her borders which could not be regarded as sufficiently ensured by the Polish-German declaration of friendship and non-aggression. The paper expressed the hope that the Polish government "on reflection, will find this pact useful both for the Polish Republic and for universal peace".

The position of Finland regarding the Eastern Pact was also negative. As the German Minister in Finland W. Blücher pointed out, Finland was looking at the Eastern Pact very negatively and was, on the contrary, seeking a closer relationship with the countries hostile towards the Soviet Union.¹²⁵

Right from the outset Nazi Germany set out to wreck the talks on the Eastern Pact. The German Foreign Minister von Neurath declared (if tentatively) on June 13 to Litvinov who was passing through Berlin that "the outline of the Pact is unacceptable to Germany".¹²⁶ German diplomacy was frantically active against the Pact, for it could have been an obstacle in the way of the Reich's aggressive designs. The German Foreign Ministry was summoning, one after the other, the representatives of the countries which were projected as parties to the pact. German diplomats were just as active in this subversive business in the capitals of the countries concerned.

Barthou decided to inform Britain, too, about the plans for concluding the Pact. He passed the outline to the British on June 27. The position of Britain, which was an influential nation in Europe, was of great importance in the talks on the Pact. Had Britain supported the idea of concluding the Eastern Pact, that could have foreclosed the

successful outcome of the negotiations, or the more so, if she became a party to the Pact as well. While giving instructions to the Soviet Embassy in Britain for discussions with British statesmen, Litvinov wrote on June 28, 1934, that "there is no means to keep bellicose Germany in check except by concluding pacts of mutual assistance".¹²⁷

The plans for the conclusion of the Eastern Pact, however, did not conform to the basic foreign policy concept of Britain's ruling quarters which dreamed of turning the fascist thrust eastward.¹²⁸ Therefore, the British government found itself among the opponents of the Pact right away. On June 13, 1934, the German Ambassador in London von Hoesch wrote about the results of his conversation with the British Foreign Secretary John Simon: "The inclusion of Russia in the European security combination is on the whole obviously not very congenial to him."¹²⁹

The Soviet Embassy in London had every reason to report to Moscow, as it qualified the position of Britain, that it was one of "ill will" towards the Eastern Pact. "The Eastern Pact was to have strongly consolidated our international positions, ensured the security of our Western borders and made things easier for us in the Far East. That could not exactly delight the British government."¹³⁰ The American *Baltimore Sun* noted on February 13, 1935, that there were some people in Britain who hated the USSR more than they loved peace. . . None of those people could admire the Eastern Pact which promised peace to communist Russia at least for 10 years. None of them would regret to see Germany, Poland and Japan attack the USSR together. They would be gladly selling war equipment to them for that purpose.

The London government did not like that the conclusion of the Eastern Pact would have strengthened the position of France, Britain's ally. It preferred to see France dependent on Britain which offered the British government a reliable instrument of influencing all French foreign policy and, by the same token, virtually assured Britain her major role in resolving many European problems.

Barthou made a special visit to London early in July 1934 to compel a reversal of Britain's unfavourable attitude towards the Eastern Pact. British diplomacy ultimately decided to meet the French ally half-way nominally, but in actual reality there was nothing but a semblance of Brit-

ish "support". The sum and substance of British policy was this: it was to make public a statement of British support for the idea of the Eastern Pact with a view to preventing the possible conclusion of a bilateral French-Soviet treaty of mutual assistance (British diplomacy was particularly averse to such a treaty), but to do everything possible to make the successful completion of negotiations on the Eastern Pact impossible by all kinds of backstage tactics. First of all, British diplomacy called for Germany to be involved in an agreement between the USSR and France on mutual assistance, although there was no doubt (rather just because of that) that Germany would not accept that proposal.

Speaking in Parliament on July 13, the British Foreign Secretary John Simon declared that Britain supported the Eastern Pact.¹³¹ At the same time, in private conversations British government officials made it clear to the German government that they had no sympathy at all, in actual fact, for the Eastern Pact. On July 19, Simon told the German Ambassador Hoesch that "the British Government had decided to support the Pact proposals in view of the threatened alternative of a formal Franco-Russian alliance, which Britain wished to avoid in all circumstances. . ."¹³²

The U.S. government was also opposed to the conclusion of the Eastern Pact. As American historian Foster Rhea Dulles pointed out in this connection, the United States of America "hoped that if war broke out in Europe, it might somehow be channeled into a crusade against Communism and accomplish the purposes which Allied intervention had failed to achieve in 1918."¹³³

Without giving an official answer for the time being to the proposal to join the Eastern Pact, Germany still did not make any secret of her negative attitude to it, seeking to frustrate the Pact plans.

The government of Poland, claiming that the pact could not be concluded without Germany, also stuck to its negative position.

The conclusion of the Eastern Pact was to meet the national interests of the Baltic countries. But it turned out that neither France, nor Britain wished to come to their aid in the event of German aggression. For instance, the Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Robert Vansittart told the Secretary-General of the Ministry

for Foreign Affairs of Latvia V. Munters that he did not see the slightest prospect ahead for the British and French governments to assume any obligations regarding a guarantee of the status quo in the Baltic region.¹³⁴

In those circumstances Latvia and Estonia took up what amounted to a wait-and-see position. Lithuania alone, under an immediate threat from Nazi Germany, was the only one of the Baltic countries to have unconditionally supported the Eastern Pact.

The new phase in the negotiations about the Eastern Pact began in the autumn of 1934. Hitler and Neurath, talking with the Polish Ambassador Lipski in Berlin on August 27, 1934, proposed secret Polish-German co-operation with the aim of preventing the conclusion of the Eastern Pact. At the same time the Nazis made clear the ground on which far-reaching Polish-German co-operation was possible. Hitler declared that if Poland's outlet to the sea had been cut east of Eastern Prussia in Versailles in 1919, Poland and Germany would long since have been allies and Poland could be turning her eyes East.¹³⁵ A few days later Lipski communicated Poland's consent to "undeclared" co-operation with the Nazi Reich with a view to scuttling the Pact.

On September 8, 1934, Germany sent an official memorandum to the other projected parties to the Eastern Pact announcing that she did not intend to participate in a multilateral treaty providing for mutual assistance. The German government indicated that it preferred bilateral agreements. Still, considering it politically disadvantageous to turn down unconditionally the idea of concluding a multilateral treaty at all, it expressed its consent to the signing of a treaty that would contain nothing beyond obligations about non-aggression and consultations.¹³⁶

The Polish government followed in the footsteps of the Nazi Reich. On September 27, 1934, it officially declared that it could not adhere to the Eastern Pact unless Germany was in it. Poland said also that she would not be a party to a pact together with Czechoslovakia and Lithuania.¹³⁷ That was a clear indication of the Polish rulers' ill designs in respect of those two states.

The USSR Joins the League of Nations

Ever since it was founded, the League of Nations had been one of the centres for planning and plotting anti-Soviet acts of imperialist powers. Therefore, the Soviet Union had, quite naturally, maintained a negative stand with regard to the League until the early 1930s. However, by 1933 the international situation had materially changed. The Anglo-French imperialist alignment was coming under mounting pressure from Japan and Germany. London and Paris had to revise much of their policy towards the Soviet Union. That told on the League of Nations as well. Moreover, many members of the League found it desirable for the USSR to participate in that organisation so as to make it more effective in resisting aggression.

The question of the USSR joining the League of Nations was first brought up by the French government when it began to show interest late in October, 1933, in co-operation with the USSR in the struggle against aggression from Germany.

The Soviet government found it possible to join the League of Nations, the more so since the aggressive powers—Japan and Germany—had left it. While handing the Eastern Pact proposal to J. Paul-Boncour on December 28, 1933, the Soviet Ambassador Dovgalevsky informed him about the Soviet consent in principle to join the League of Nations.

Setting out the Soviet Union's position with regard to the League of Nations, Stalin said in a conversation with American journalist Walter Duranty: "In spite of the withdrawal of Germany and Japan from the League of Nations or, perhaps, just because of that, the League can become a certain brake to hold up military operations or impede them. If that is so, if the League can turn out to be something like a little hurdle to make things somewhat more difficult for war and somewhat easier for peace, then we are not against the League. Should that be the course of historical events, it cannot be ruled out that we may support the League of Nations in spite of its glaring shortcomings."¹³⁸

The French government reverted to the question of the USSR joining the League of Nations in June 1934. The Soviet Union gave a positive reply. The French Foreign Minister was handed a statement by the Soviet government

to the effect that the USSR had earlier linked its accession to the League with the conclusion of the Eastern Pact, but was now prepared to join the League subject to an appropriate invitation and a guarantee of a permanent seat in the Council. The USSR, it was pointed out, expected that this step "will facilitate the conclusion of pacts to strengthen peace".¹³⁹

Most of the members of the League of Nations reacted positively to the Soviet Union's accession to that international organisation. The British government also declared, not without some hesitation though, that it was ready to support the idea of the Soviet Union joining the League of Nations. However, the governments which held an extremely hostile position with regard to the USSR, reacted to that step of the Soviet Union unfavourably.

Poland's position could not but call for vigilance. The Polish ruling establishment always was after an international isolation of the USSR so as to create a favourable setting for its anti-Soviet designs. With the USSR in the League of Nations (just as with the Eastern Pact concluded), the position of the Soviet Union would have changed appreciably. The plans for an international isolation of the USSR would also have been frustrated. There was a very painful reaction in Warsaw, besides, to the idea that on joining the League of Nations, the USSR was likewise to become a permanent member of the Council. The Polish leaders had for years pressed hard for Poland to be recognised as a Great Power and a dominant force in Eastern Europe. To this end, they strove to secure, notably, a permanent seat in the Council of the League of Nations. The Soviet Union's accession to that organisation and the granting of a permanent seat to it in the Council, that is, the recognition of its immense role in international affairs, combined to strike at the great-power ambitions of the Polish government. On July 4, the Soviet People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs reported from Geneva that the Polish Minister for Foreign Affairs J. Beck was active behind the scenes conducting "virulent propaganda against our joining the League".¹⁴⁰

The position of Finland with regard to the Soviet Union's accession to the League of Nations also proved to be unfriendly. The question of the USSR joining the League of Nations was taken as an excuse for yet another anti-Soviet campaign in the Finnish bourgeois press.

A negative stance was taken up also by certain countries whose ruling quarters, just because of their class hatred for the Soviet state, did not find it possible to establish even diplomatic relations with the USSR (Portugal, Switzerland).

On September 14, 1934, the Soviet People's Commissar on his arrival in Geneva, concerted with the French representatives the outline invitation for the USSR to join the League of Nations and the Soviet government's reply to this invitation.

On the following day, representatives of the 30 member-countries of the League of Nations sent a message to the Soviet government pointing out that they, "considering that the task of maintenance and organisation of peace, which is the basic purpose of the League of Nations, demands the co-operation of all nations, hereby invite the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics to join the League of Nations and to bring in its valuable co-operation."¹⁴¹

The question of the USSR joining the League of Nations was examined at an Assembly session on September 18. There had to be a two-thirds majority for the admission and a unanimous vote for the election to Council membership. 39 members of the League voted for the admission of the USSR to the League, 3 against (the Netherlands, Portugal and Switzerland), and 7 abstained. There was not a single vote against the inclusion of the USSR in the Council, but 40 nations abstained.¹⁴² So the USSR was admitted to the League of Nations and became a permanent member of its Council.

Speaking in the Assembly in connection with the Soviet Union's accession to the League, the Soviet Foreign Commissar declared that unfortunately the League of Nations had no means at its disposal for the complete abolition of war. However, given the firm will and close co-operation of all its members, much can be done to prevent war. "The Soviet government has never stopped working to achieve this end ever since it came into existence", he declared. "Henceforward it wants to join its efforts with those of other nations represented in the League." The Soviet representative said that mere declarations were not enough to keep the peace, it took some more effective means to do so.¹⁴³

The Soviet Union's entry into the League of Nations substantially reinforced that international organisation and its potentialities for the maintenance of peace. The Soviet de-

fence capability and economic resources materially increased the League's potential powers and possibilities essential to the struggle against aggression. The Soviet government's determination to do everything possible to check aggression and strengthen peace could increase the efficiency of the League of Nations and enhance its role in resolving the problems of war and peace.

The Deputy Secretary-General of the League of Nations Francis Paul Walters of Britain, admitted that Soviet participation in that international organisation was "an event of first-class importance in the political evolution of the post-war world".¹⁴⁴ Even bourgeois politicians and historians had to admit that the Soviet Union became the most active partisan of the policy of collective security in the League.¹⁴⁵ Once in the League of Nations, the Soviet Union became a full-fledged party to what was the major international organisation in those years, where it could play an active part, on a par with Britain, France and other countries, in resolving international problems, including the problems of peace and security. All that opened up further opportunities for the Soviet government to intensify the battle for peace and against aggression.

Soviet-French Protocol

In view of the negative position of the Nazi Reich and Poland, the Soviet government decided to press for the conclusion of the Eastern Pact without them, that is, with the countries willing to participate in it.

The French Foreign Minister Louis Barthou kept up his active stand in favour of the conclusion of the pact. It was not for nothing that he was one of the European statesmen the Nazi secret services decided to "remove". The assassination of Barthou was entrusted to the Assistant German Military Attaché in Paris Speidel. A detailed plan for the assassination, codenamed "Teuton Sword", was worked out. The killing of Barthou in Marseilles on October 9, 1934, was a serious blow at the plans for concluding the Eastern Pact.

Laval, who became the French Foreign Minister, made some fundamental changes in the country's foreign policy since he considered an understanding with Germany to be

his main concern. Even at the Barthou funeral, Laval told the Czechoslovak Foreign Minister Eduard Beneš that there was no point in being in a hurry to develop a closer relationship with the USSR since it was more important to reach agreement with Germany.¹⁴⁶ The French Minister declared that "of all the French political leaders he, Laval, had done most for a rapprochement with the Germans," and that he was "ready to reach agreement with Germany".¹⁴⁷

All that meant an end to the process of consolidation of Soviet-French relations which had been going on until then. Taking into account the prevailing mood in France, Laval kept saying that he would carry on Barthou's policy, while working underhand towards "freezing" relations between the USSR and France. It was not for nothing that the French Foreign Minister should have been christened the "balancing Laval".

The most important task before Soviet diplomacy at the time was to forestall a German-French deal which meant, above all, that the Nazis would be getting a free hand in the East in return for Germany's pledge not to attack France. The Soviet People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs proceeded from the assumption that, should the Eastern Pact be concluded, it would be, apart from everything else, a certain guarantee against an anti-Soviet collusion between France and Germany. Since there was no reason to expect the Pact to be signed soon, it was decided to offer to the French government to sign an accord about a "reciprocal commitment of the USSR and France to conclude no political agreements with Germany without prior mutual notification as well as about informing each other about all political negotiations with Germany".¹⁴⁸

The Soviet government succeeded in having a Soviet-French protocol signed on December 5, 1934, whereby both governments pledged themselves not to enter into any negotiations about any agreements that could damage the preparations for, and the conclusion of, the Eastern Pact. A few days later Czechoslovakia acceded to the Soviet-French protocol.

*Treaty of Mutual Assistance Between
the USSR and France*

Once it had become finally clear from Hitler's statements in March 1935 that Germany and Poland were opposed to the draft Eastern Pact, the Soviet government brought up on March 29, the question of concluding a trilateral Soviet-French-Czechoslovak treaty of mutual assistance.¹⁴⁹ Paris, however, favoured the conclusion of bilateral Soviet-French and Soviet-Czechoslovak treaties.

The difference between these proposals was essentially that the French one urged that France and the USSR should assume separate commitments in front of Czechoslovakia, while the Soviet proposal called for a joint commitment of the two powers. Such a joint guarantee by the two major powers of Europe would have been more substantial for Czechoslovakia. Another thing a trilateral treaty would mean for Czechoslovakia was that she was not obliged to afford assistance to the USSR single-handed, unless such assistance was provided by France. Czechoslovakia thought it impossible to conclude a treaty of mutual assistance with the USSR without such a reservation. A similar consideration was of no lesser significance for the USSR because it was also anxious to avoid being bound by a treaty obligation regarding assistance to Czechoslovakia without any guarantee that France would come to her aid.

However, the French government did not want to commit itself to concert its position regarding assistance to Czechoslovakia with the Soviet Union. It sought to retain full freedom of action in deciding whether or not to afford assistance to Czechoslovakia.

The Soviet government still considered it most reasonable to conclude the Eastern Pact in one form or another. On April 2, 1935, the Soviet People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs informed its Ambassador in France that the Soviet position "is to have a pact of mutual assistance in the East with Germany and Poland as parties to it and, should Germany refuse to participate, with, at least Poland and, in case of Poland's disagreement, with France, Czechoslovakia and the Baltic countries as parties to it... As to Laval's new proposal about a bilateral pact of mutual assistance, it is not clear to us what we can gain from it so that was yet to be cleared up."¹⁵⁰

The Soviet Union still could not fail to attach major importance to the Eastern Pact safeguarding the Baltic states as well from German aggression. On this subject, the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs indicated that "the occupation of those countries by Germany would be the start of her attack on the USSR". Therefore, France must lend assistance to the Soviet Union as soon as the German Armed Forces crossed their Eastern border. Should the Baltic countries be left without the guarantees of France and other parties to the Eastern Pact, and should the Soviet Union want to come "to the aid of those countries", the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs stated, "we would be deprived of French assistance as well in the course of further hostilities and with Germany developing her offensive against our borders, because we would have been the first to go to war against Germany to defend the Baltic countries. We would, evidently, have to confront France and Britain in a major dispute on this account".¹⁵¹

On April 6, the Soviet Ambassador in Paris, V. P. Potemkin, made an appropriate statement to the French Minister for Foreign Affairs. However, the French government did not support the Soviet proposal for concluding the Eastern Pact without Germany and Poland. Besides, Laval told the Soviet Ambassador that France had never agreed to guarantee aid to the Baltic states. Therefore, the only option was to conclude bilateral agreements. On April 9, the French government officially announced that France was willing to conclude a treaty of mutual assistance with the USSR.¹⁵²

In view of the worsening international situation and impossibility of a larger agreement, the Soviet government decided to sign a bilateral Soviet-French Treaty of Mutual Assistance. On April 10, the Soviet Ambassador in France Potemkin received appropriate instructions from Moscow. These called, in particular, for including a provision about the USSR and France affording immediate assistance to one another in case of aggression, without waiting for any decision by the Council of the League of Nations.¹⁵³

In mid-April 1935 Litvinov and Laval held negotiations in Geneva to draft the treaty. But these negotiations showed that Laval could not be relied upon. His ambition to come to terms with the Nazis was only too obvious. Litvinov pointed out that Laval would be glad to see the Soviet-

French pact "wrecked without him being personally reproached for it". "But Laval himself would not want to stop the negotiations and renounce the pact unless the outlines of a collusion with Germany emerged. The best thing for Laval to do was to drag out the negotiations in the hope that Germany would make some attractive offer to France with assistance from Britain."

Litvinov found from his discussions with Laval that "one should not pin any serious hopes on the pact in the sense of real military aid in the event of war. Our security will still remain the exclusive concern of the Red Army. The pact has predominantly political significance for us, reducing the chances of war both from Germany and from Poland and Japan."¹⁵⁴

The Treaty of Mutual Assistance between the USSR and France was signed on May 2, 1935. The preamble pointed out that the treaty had the aim of strengthening peace in Europe and that the two nations would work for an appropriate European agreement. They undertook to consult one another in the event of a danger of aggression against the USSR or France, and to lend one another immediate assistance in the event of an attack by any European state. The protocol to the treaty made it clear that the contracting parties were under obligation to afford assistance to one another subsequent to an appropriate recommendation from the Council of the League of Nations; if the Council still did not produce any recommendation, the obligation regarding assistance would nevertheless be fulfilled. The treaty was concluded for a term of five years. Both governments declared in the protocol that they considered it desirable to conclude a regional agreement containing the terms of mutual assistance to replace the Soviet-French treaty.¹⁵⁵

The government of Czechoslovakia declared its desire to conclude a similar treaty with the USSR. The Treaty of Mutual Assistance between the USSR and Czechoslovakia was signed on May 16, 1935. It had a reservation, included upon the initiative of the Czechoslovak government, to the effect that the obligations of the USSR and Czechoslovakia to provide assistance to one another would remain valid only in case of assistance from France as well as to the USSR and Czechoslovakia in the event of aggression.¹⁵⁶

The conclusion of the treaties of mutual assistance with France and Czechoslovakia was a result of the Soviet

Union's vigorous and consistent struggle for peace and against aggression. The Soviet-French and the Soviet-Czechoslovak treaties of mutual assistance could have become a major factor for peace and security in Europe. What was required, however, for that to be so, was for all the parties to the treaties to fulfil the commitments they had assumed in good faith. These treaties could also have been the nucleus for other European nations threatened by Nazi aggression to rally round the USSR, France and Czechoslovakia. But the French government, under Laval, never thought of earnest co-operation with the USSR. Laval's major preoccupation was to reach an accommodation with Germany. Being unable to avoid signing the treaty with the Soviet Union, since that was demanded by the largest sections of the French people, Laval saw it as, above all, a means of making Germany enter into an amicable agreement with France. Laval said he was signing the pact with the USSR to have more trump cards in playing for agreement with Berlin.¹⁵⁷ At the same time Laval feared lest the USSR, knowing about the intention of British and French reactionary elements to arrive at an understanding with the Nazi Reich, should find it necessary to work for normalising relations with Germany. The desire to prevent the revival of "Rapallo" was one of the major reasons why Laval did not venture to break off negotiations with the USSR and agreed to sign the treaty.¹⁵⁸

Laval affirmed on various occasions that he did not propose to turn the Pact with the USSR into an effective agreement, that is, supplement it with a military convention. For instance, he assured German diplomats that he had no thought of developing the pact with the USSR "into a closer alliance".¹⁵⁹ During his meeting with Göring in the latter half of May of 1935, Laval assured him that he was doing everything to lessen the significance of the treaty with the USSR.¹⁶⁰

Although the position of Czechoslovakia was particularly precarious, her ruling circles attached but limited importance to the treaty. In a letter of information to the Czechoslovak ministers abroad, E. Beneš, explaining his government's position regarding the treaty with the Soviet Union, wrote that should Russia be once more kept out of European affairs as she had been at the 1922 Genoa Conference, that could again automatically entail a German-Russian rappro-

chement. So it was necessary that co-operation with Russia should be maintained and that she should not be kept out.¹⁶¹ The day before treaty was signed, Beneš argued with the British Minister in Prague that the treaty changed nothing about the situation in Europe, but would keep Germany and Russia away from each other.¹⁶²

The approach to the Eastern Pact after the conclusion of the Soviet-Czechoslovak treaty and the Soviet-French treaty had to be different. The Soviet government considered that a multilateral treaty of a more limited substance, with Germany acceding to it, would have a certain sense as a complement to those treaties. On May 16, 1935, the governments of the USSR and France put forward their proposal for concluding the Eastern Pact containing obligations about non-aggression, consultations and refusal of aid to the aggressor. The Soviet government told the government of France that it considered it desirable for the treaty to be signed by the USSR, France, Poland, Germany, Czechoslovakia and the Baltic countries that would wish to join it.¹⁶³

The French government transmitted a memorandum to the government of Germany proposing that the Eastern Pact should be concluded on the foregoing terms.¹⁶⁴

However, Laval once more showed himself as cunning as he was shortly afterwards. On June 25, 1935, the French Ambassador in Berlin François-Poncet, meeting the Secretary of State at the German Ministry for Foreign Affairs, von Bülow, told him that in the event of an Eastern Pact being signed, even without the provision for mutual assistance, the Soviet-French treaty "would become invalid".¹⁶⁵ During his conversation with the German Ambassador in Paris von Köster on July 27, Laval said he attached major importance to a Franco-German understanding and was prepared to make certain concessions to bring it about. He emphasised the identity of views of the two countries on the struggle against Bolshevism. Pointing out that the Franco-Soviet treaty had been concluded for a short term of five years, Laval stressed that this alone showed that France was not desirous of binding herself up with the USSR for too long. He declared that should Germany agree to co-operate and undertake, by concluding a multilateral pact, to refrain from attacking any of its signatories, France "would hand her paper back to Russia",¹⁶⁶ that is, would abrogate her treaty with the USSR.

That is to say that right after the signing of the Soviet-French treaty, the French foreign service entered into negotiations with the Nazis which meant, to all intents and purposes, that in the event of agreement with Germany, Franco was prepared to betray her ally and renounce the treaty she had just concluded with the USSR.

However, the German government decided to reject the Eastern Pact in its new form as well. It self-righteously declared that because of the conclusion of the Franco-Soviet treaty of mutual assistance, its earlier statements on the matter were null and void.

It was, beyond dispute, Hitler Germany that played the leading role in thwarting the plans for concluding the Eastern Pact. Not only did she refuse to be a party to it, but exerted pressure on other possible parties to the pact as well. And yet, should the governments of all other nations, projected as parties to the pact, have really shown themselves far-sighted enough and concerned about the security of their respective countries, they ought to have signed the Pact even without Germany in it. Much of the blame for the breakdown of the negotiations about the Eastern Pact lay, therefore, with the ruling circles of bourgeois-landlord Poland.

A large measure of responsibility for wrecking the conclusion of the Eastern Pact rested, besides, with the government of Britain whose policy hampered the effort to strengthen the security of Europe. Even the Polish diplomatic service referred to the "double-dealing of England" which, while paying lip-service to the idea of the Eastern Pact was, in reality, wholly appreciative of Poland's negative stand.¹⁶⁷

Although the Soviet-French treaty had been signed, Laval, who became the French head of government in June 1935 (along with retaining his post of Minister for Foreign Affairs), was deliberately sabotaging it.

Under the French Constitution, the treaty could have been endorsed and put into effect by the President of France without delay, but Laval had it referred to parliament notorious for its unwieldy multitier procedure. As long as Laval remained head of government, the Treaty of Mutual Assistance between the USSR and France never came into effect.

The matter was taken off the ground only after a new go-

vernment (led by right-wing radical Albert Sarraut) was formed in France in January 1936, and the situation in Western Europe was once more strained because of the Nazi preparations for moving German forces into the demilitarised Rhineland. On February 27, 1936, the Chamber of Deputies of the French Parliament finally ratified the treaty by 353 votes to 164. The treaty came into effect on March 27, 1936.

*Soviet-French Military Co-operation
as a Point at Issue*

The conclusion of treaties of mutual assistance usually brought with it the establishment of close contact between the General Staffs of the countries concerned. That was what France always did. While exchanging notes with the British government on April 1, 1936, reaffirming Britain's obligation to assist France in the event of a German attack on her, French diplomacy compelled a provision about negotiations to be started forthwith between the General Staffs of the two countries.¹⁶⁸ On military co-operation with the USSR, however, France took a different line.

Immediately after the signing of the Soviet-French Treaty of Mutual Assistance, the Soviet government, seizing the opportunity offered by Laval's arrival in Moscow, raised the question of military co-operation. Laval cabled from Moscow on May 16, 1935, that the Soviet government, in view of possible aggression, proposed "considering now the technical arrangements to give the pact its full effect".¹⁶⁹ The Soviet military attaché in France informed the French General Staff late in May that the Soviet General Staff was ready for "contacts to be established with the French General Staff".¹⁷⁰

The General Staff of the Soviet Armed Forces began planning action with a view to lending military assistance to France in the event of her being attacked by Germany.¹⁷¹ In June 1935 the Soviet Ambassador in France Potemkin took the matter up with the French War Minister Jean Fabry. However, as the latter admitted, Laval "did not relish the brutal automatism of a military convention".¹⁷²

The Deputy Chief of the French General Staff, General Loizeau attended a military exercise in the Ukraine in the autumn of 1935 at the invitation of the General Staff of the

Red Army. He came to the conclusion that Soviet servicemen had a high morale and great stamina and that the Soviet forces were capable of holding back enemy forces in the event of a conflict and even in the opening stages of war.¹⁷³

In spite of general Loizeau's favourable evaluation, the French General Staff looked upon the Soviet-French treaty as a purely diplomatic document without ever considering it right and proper to complement it with a military convention. As the French historian M. Mourin pointed out, the French General Staff proceeded from the following considerations: "If the French forces remained orientated, following the concepts of the government's general policy, only towards defensive action behind the Maginot Line, military accords with the Soviet Union would be of little use, taking into account the absence of a common frontier between Russia and Germany and the refusal of Poland and Romania, confirmed in September 1935, to accord Soviet troops the right of passage through their territory."¹⁷⁴

Instead of taking steps towards an understanding with the Polish and Romanian governments, the French authorities decided to shelve the issue of military co-operation with the USSR. The Chief of the French General Staff, General Gamelin, arranged with the French Ministry for Foreign Affairs that the methods of French-Russian military co-operation "will not be discussed".¹⁷⁵

Objectively, France should have been even more interested than the USSR in making the treaty really effective by having it supplemented with agreement on military co-operation, for the Soviet Union had no common border with Germany. So it was more probable for the Soviet-French treaty to come into play when the Nazi Reich attacked France (Germany had a common border with her and had invaded her territory more than once) or any of the weaker European countries with whom France was linked by allied commitments, that is, Czechoslovakia or Poland. Once at war with Germany, in consequence, France would, naturally, be interested in getting assistance from the USSR. But while a German attack on the USSR was impossible without German forces having to pass through the territory of East European countries, it was just as impossible for the Soviet Union to lend effective assistance to France without Soviet forces having to pass through the territory of certain coun-

tries of Eastern Europe. Therefore, the question of how the USSR could afford assistance to France did arise several times.

Early in 1937 the Soviet military attaché in France was asked by the French General Staff about the form and amount of aid the USSR could provide in case of a German attack on France or Czechoslovakia. On February 17, 1937, the Soviet Ambassador and the Soviet military attaché in Paris communicated the answer from the Soviet General Staff to the Chief of the French General Staff and then to the Prime Minister of France:

"There can be two versions of Soviet military aid.

1. If Poland, which was in alliance with France, and Romania, which was in alliance with France and Czechoslovakia, fulfil their duty and give consent to the passage of Soviet troops through their territory under a decision taken at their own discretion or in compliance with a decision by the Council of the League of Nations, the USSR will have an opportunity of providing its aid and support by all the services. . .

2. Should Poland and Romania object, for unclear reasons, to the USSR affording assistance to France and Czechoslovakia, or should they refuse to permit the transit of Soviet troops through their territory, assistance from the USSR in such a case would inevitably be limited.

The USSR will be in a position to dispatch its troops by sea into the territory of France and its Air Force units to Czechoslovakia and France.

The size of this assistance should be stipulated under a special agreement between the states concerned.

In both cases, the USSR will offer naval assistance.

The USSR will be able to supply France and Czechoslovakia with petrol, fuel oil, lubricants, manganese, foodstuffs, armaments, engines, tanks, aircraft, etc."

The Soviet General Staff put the following questions on its part:

"1. What aid could France afford to the USSR in the event of an attack by Germany?

In what way should the size of this aid be fixed?

2. What arms could France deliver to the USSR?"¹⁷⁶

There was, however, no reply to these counter-questions.

This document shows that the Soviet government was determined to have the closest possible co-operation with

France in resisting possible aggression by Nazi Germany. In particular, the Soviet Union was prepared to conduct negotiations with France to draw up specific terms for the provision of mutual assistance. Unfortunately, the government of France did not support this initiative in spite of the nation's vital interests.

On handing this document, the Soviet government officially raised the "cardinal question" about effective Soviet-French military co-operation as early as 1937, which arose subsequently (in August 1939) during the Soviet-British-French military negotiations in Moscow. Effective Soviet involvement in war against the Nazi aggressors was possible only in case of a positive solution to the issue of Soviet troop transit through the territory of the countries lying between the USSR and Germany.* And it was sheer hypocrisy on the part of military representatives of Britain and France to pretend in 1939 that for Soviet military representatives to have raised such a question was something unforeseen which they had no possibility to prepare for in advance.

In the course of the Soviet-French negotiations about the Eastern Pact and the conclusion of the Treaty of Mutual Assistance between the USSR and France, the governments of all the nations concerned carefully analysed all the issues fundamental to curbing the aggressors which cropped up again in 1939 right before the outbreak of war. Of course, it would have been far better for peace in Europe, if the ruling circles of the Western powers had realised in good time, back in the mid-1930s, the full gravity of the danger the aggressors posed to all nations of Europe. In the national interest of their countries, they should have got down to setting up a dependable common front to safeguard peace together with the Soviet Union instead of working out their insidious plans for a collusion with Germany so as to set her against the USSR. The Soviet Union was determined to do its best to safeguard peace.

* The importance of the position of Poland and Romania was indisputably realised in Britain and France. This was to be seen from the memorandum compiled for the British government on November 12, 1937, by the Chiefs of Staff of Britain's Naval, Air and Land Forces. It stated that intervention of Russia on the side of France and Britain can quickly become a real danger for Germany only in case Poland maintains a friendly position and shows desire for co-operation. (I. Colvin, *The Chamberlain Cabinet*, London, 1971, p. 60).

Chapter II

NAZI AGGRESSORS AND THEIR BACKERS

GERMAN AND ITALIAN FASCISTS ON THE OFFENSIVE

Britain's Bid for an Understanding with Germany

Early in 1935 the British government made yet another attempt to come to terms with the Nazi Reich and to reanimate the Four Power Pact. They realised perfectly well that the course of events in Germany and her rearmament, first and foremost, would lead her before long to attempting to redraw the map of Europe and, indeed, not only of Europe. Some serious thought was given in London to the ways of saving the British Empire from that danger.

The general line of British policy was to ward off the danger menacing the British Empire through an imperialist deal with the Nazi Reich, as stated earlier on, and channel the aggressive designs of the Nazis eastward, against the Soviet Union.

It was decided in London to begin negotiations with Germany, having first concerted the major issues with France. In mid-December 1934, the British government invited the French head of government Pierre Flandin and the French Foreign Minister Pierre Laval to London to negotiate the subsequent political course of the two countries.

At a meeting on January 14, 1935, the British cabinet debated its position on the coming Anglo-French negotiations. The British ministers proceeded from the assumption that the major objective of Britain and France was to achieve agreement with Germany, and, among other things, to bring her back into the League of Nations. To that end, they were prepared to acknowledge Germany's equal rights in the arms field. London knew that France would not agree to Germany's rearmament without some extra guarantees of her own security which would make it more difficult to reach an agreement with her, the more so since the British government held a negative position in the matter. It was

decided that Britain must not reaffirm the commitments she had under the 1925 Treaty of Locarno, and that there was even less reason to agree to consultations of representatives of the General Staffs of Britain and France. It was necessary to avoid admitting that demilitarisation of the Rhineland by Germany was a "vital British interest".¹

London was prepared to agree to the establishment of German land forces of a total strength of 300,000 (21 infantry and 3 cavalry divisions) and an air force equal both to the British and the French, that is, with a total of 1,000 first-line aircraft.²

In order to have the French government accept those plans, London decided to offer it to conclude a pact of instant mutual aid in addition to the 1925 Treaty of Locarno between the parties to this treaty in the event of an air attack (the so-called Air Pact). This treaty was of interest to Britain herself, first and foremost. But it would have a certain sense for France as well because under the Treaty of Locarno the provision of assistance to a victim of aggression was bound up with the cumbersome procedure of the League of Nations while the Air Pact implied instant aid.

There were Anglo-French negotiations in London from February 1 to 3, 1935. The British government proposed finding common ground for the two countries to begin negotiations with Germany. London proceeded from the assumption that this could not be done without abrogating the military articles of the Treaty of Versailles limiting Germany's armaments. It was prepared to grant the Nazi Reich the right to increase its armed strength. To "reassure" France, the British government expressed its readiness for an Air Pact to be concluded between the signatories of the Treaty of Locarno.³

The Anglo-French conference ended with a joint communique, being issued. With reference to the negotiations between France and Italy early in January in 1935, and subsequently to the negotiations between representatives of Britain and France in London, the British and French ministers came out for the "progress" thus achieved to be developed through "the direct and effective co-operation of Germany". They spoke up for a "general settlement" consisting of the Eastern Pact and the Danube Pact (non-intervention in the affairs of Austria), agreement on armaments to replace the military articles of the Treaty of Versailles

limiting the arms forces of Germany; and agreement on the return of Germany into the League of Nations, and, above all, the proposal for concluding the Air Pact.⁴

It was realised in London that the decisions taken at the Anglo-French conference could not but cause concern in the Soviet Union. The Foreign Office even drew up a special memorandum on February 7 clearly demonstrating the foreign policy designs of the British ruling circles. It emphasised: "Russia is really afraid that Germany, in combination with Poland, is planning to expand in the East" and is, therefore, interested in co-operation with France. Since France is also concerned over her security, she is prepared to co-operate with Russia. However, the projected "general settlement" with Germany and the Air Pact were designed to give France the security she wanted.

Those who drew up the memorandum proceeded from the assumption that all that would be subverting Soviet-French co-operation and the forecasting of the subsequent course of events could be based on the following considerations: "If Germany and Poland had no plans for future penetration towards the East, they would not be so opposed to the Eastern Pact... The need of expansion will force Germany towards the East as being the only field open to her, and as long as the Bolshevik regime exists in Russia it is impossible for this expansion to take merely the form of peaceful penetration."⁵

This document clearly indicated the full meaning of the "general settlement" with Germany which the British and French ruling quarters had agreed on during their negotiations in London. That was the same old Four Power Pact in a new wrapping. The policy of the British government clearly revealed an intention to ensure "Western security" through an agreement with Germany and channel fascist aggression against the Soviet Union.

Indeed, the London communique could not but worry the Soviet government. Soviet Ambassador in London I. M. Maisky pointed out that the position held by London was to be explained by the fact that "there has been revived hope in the British government quarters in recent weeks for a possibility of finding common ground with Hitler."⁶ Neither could one overlook some articles by Lord Lothian and other British advocates of the "appeasement" policy which appeared in the British press in those days. In view of that, the

People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs stated that the "British concerned themselves only with security in the West without having any interest in the East or Southeast where they are prepared to give Hitler a free hand."⁷

Driven by their class hatred, the British reactionary quarters were prepared to put even their own interests at stake just to prevent the international positions of the USSR from being strengthened and keep it internationally isolated so as to make it easier for the fascist aggressors to attack it. Being aware of the British government's readiness to meet Germany's demand for armaments, Hitler decided to confront it with an accomplished fact just before the projected Anglo-German negotiations.

There was an announcement in Berlin on March 13, 1935, about the creation of a German Air Force and on March 16—about the introduction of conscription. In that way the Nazi Reich grossly violated the major provisions of the Versailles Peace Treaty and launched accelerated preparations for war. Nevertheless, the British government was still ready to negotiate with the ringleaders of the Nazi Reich. The matter was taken up at a British Cabinet meeting on March 18. It decided that in spite of the above-mentioned action by the German government there was no reason for abandoning the visit to Berlin by British representatives.⁸

The Soviet government considered it necessary to do everything possible to forestall the rearming of Germany and the preparations for, and launching of, another world war. The only way to do so was through joint action by all the nations under threat of aggression. The Soviet Union called for a conference of the states which had signed the Treaty of Versailles and other peace treaties, in which the USSR could also take part.

The men in London, however, preferred to negotiate with the aggressor rather than oppose aggression. On March 25 and 26, the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, John Simon, and the Lord Privy Seal, Anthony Eden, made a visit to Berlin for conversations with Hitler, Neurath and Ribbentrop. The conversations showed that the Nazi Reich leaders were in no way disposed to accept most of the proposals put forward by Britain and France on February 3, that is, they did not want to be bound by any commitments which could have subsequently hindered the implementation of their aggressive designs. Hitler announced that he

intended to create a 550,000-strong army, that his Air Force had already achieved parity with Britain and claimed the right to have a Navy equivalent to 35 per cent of the British Navy. Führer reacted positively to the offer to conclude the Air Pact, expressing willingness to continue negotiations on this subject with the British government. It was also agreed that bilateral Anglo-German naval talks were to be started before long.⁹

The Berlin conversations provided striking evidence of the aggressive designs of the Nazis. The hopes of the British ruling circles to use the conversations for laying the ground for agreement between the four Western powers on all issues in dispute were dashed. In spite of the fact that the policy of the Nazis was increasingly aggressive, the British government went ahead with its policy of collusion with the aggressors in the hope of turning their aggression eastwards.

The Berlin visit by John Simon and Anthony Eden suggested the possibility of their visiting also Warsaw and Moscow. The Soviet government favoured the idea.¹⁰ However, what created a predicament in London was the puzzle over the question of who of the British ministers was to go to Moscow. The matter was examined at a British Cabinet meeting on March 6. It was decided the visit to Moscow was to be made by Lord Privy Seal Anthony Eden.¹¹

While discussing the matter with Soviet Ambassador Maisky, John Simon did not conceal that far from everybody in Britain was sympathetic about the idea of a visit by a British Minister to Moscow; there were influential groups opposed to such a move.¹²

Stalin, Molotov and Litvinov conferred with Anthony Eden on March 28 and 29. The Soviet representatives at these talks declared that, considering the aggressive aspirations of the Nazi Reich, the USSR found it necessary to continue pressing for the conclusion of the Eastern Pact. At the same time Eden's attention was drawn to the fact that the British government's policy of conniving at the rearmament of Germany could have dangerous consequences for Britain herself. The Soviet Union, the representatives of the USSR declared, had not the slightest doubt as to the aggressive nature of the Nazi Reich because its foreign policy was guided by two basic ideas—that of revenge and that of establishing their own domination of Europe. How-

ever, it would have been still too early to say in what particular direction Germany would be striking first. "Hitler, while pushing his plan for Eastern expansion into the foreground at the present time, wants to have the Western nations rise to the bait and get them to sanction his armaments. When these armaments attain the level Hitler wanted them to, the guns might well start firing in an entirely different direction."¹³

Intense preparations got under way in London in the meantime for an Anglo-Franco-Italian conference in Stresa which was to be called because of Germany's violation of the military articles of the Treaty of Versailles. The British government's position at the conference was thoroughly examined at a Cabinet meeting on April 8, 1935. The general view of the members of the Cabinet was, as stated in the Minutes of the Cabinet meeting, that should France and Italy propose an end to negotiations with Germany and a tough line in the policy of the three nations towards her, Britain "should not agree to it". Therefore, Britain's position was: "We should not agree to make a complete breach with Germany and to take no action except to threaten her... We should make clear that we should like to make more propositions to Germany." Britain could not agree to the conference ending with a declaration to say that Britain "would not stand a breach of the peace anywhere... We ought not to accept further commitments... Having established contact with Germany we ought to keep it." To cut it off "would be an obvious mistake".¹⁴

The conference at Stresa raised the question of applying sanctions against Germany but the British representatives spoke out against them.¹⁵ The powers attending the conference limited themselves to expressing their regret over Germany's violation of the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. John Simon declared that the British representatives "could not at Stresa enter into a new commitment".¹⁶

With the conference over, some Western commentators referred to a "Stresa Front". Yet that was nothing but a smoke screen to cover up the retreat of Britain and France in the face of German imperialism which was regaining its power.

The Council of the League of Nations went into session immediately after the conference. It produced a resolution based on the conference decisions which was not surprising

because its participants called the tune in the Council. But the British representatives did their utmost to emasculate them. John Simon vaingloriously cabled from Geneva: "I succeeded in considerably attenuating the terms of the resolution agreed at Stresa."¹⁷

Largely through the efforts of the British government, the resolution of the Council of the League of Nations was limited to deploring any unilateral breach of international commitments, noting that this could put the League of Nations in peril. The Council's decision was not, naturally, sufficient to raise a dependable barrier in the way of the Nazi Reich's aggressive policy.

Meanwhile, London was pressing for negotiations about the balance of the naval forces of Britain and Germany. Any agreement on that subject meant that Britain would be legalising the Nazi Reich's infringement of the respective articles of the Treaty of Versailles. The building up of the German naval forces spelled danger to many nations with navies not as large as that of the British Empire. That applied, for example, to France, the USSR, and other countries. To prove that Germany must have a Navy equivalent to 35 per cent of the British one, Neurath made it quite clear that only in that case would Germany have the possibility to dominate the Baltic,¹⁸ that is intimated in no uncertain terms that the proposed deal was anti-Soviet. While neglecting the rightful interests of many nations, Britain was unilaterally prepared to grant Germany the right to a sweeping build-up of her Navy.

A German delegation led by Ribbentrop arrived in London for the talks. It was extremely truculent. The main topic to negotiate was the size of the prospective German Navy. However, Ribbentrop opened with a statement of Hitler's intention to build a Navy 35 per cent the size of the British one. He said he was prepared to start negotiations only if the British officially consented to that demand right away.¹⁹ The rulers of the proud British Empire were quite disconcerted. Their protests were turned down out of hand, and London gave in. The preliminary condition laid down by the Nazis was accepted. On June 6, John Simon declared that "His Majesty's Government intended to recognise the Reich Chancellor's decision as the basis of future Naval discussions."²⁰ So there was practically nothing left to negotiate.

The Anglo-German naval agreement was signed on June 18, 1935. Germany was granted the right to enlarge her Navy by more than five times. The Nazi Reich now had the opportunity of expanding its Navy so that, although not in a position to rival Britain on the seas, it still could be, as Churchill put it, the "master of the Baltic".²¹

The effect that agreement had on the subsequent course of events in the Baltic and, more particularly, on the policies of the Baltic states, can be seen from a report by the German legation in Estonia in 1935: "This agreement is viewed as recognition of Germany's hegemony on the Baltic which has led to a higher evaluation of Germany as a power factor. There has since been appreciable change in the position of the leading personalities relative to Germany."²² The German Minister W. Blücher in Helsinki appraised the influence of the treaty on Finland in a similar way.²³

The British government's policy of encouraging fascist aggression against the East posed a tremendous danger to world peace, and to Britain. Winston Churchill, one of the few Conservatives who took a more sober view of the trend of developments in Europe, pointed out in his conversation with the Soviet Ambassador to Britain on June 14, 1935, that Hitler Germany was a huge war machine with half a dozen gangsters in control. Nobody knew what they would do tomorrow and where they would strike at. He conceded that the USSR might not be Germany's first target, because that would be rather dangerous for herself. "Other directions," he said, "are more probable." While criticising those British leaders who hoped to secure Britain's interests by giving Germany a free hand in the East, Churchill said that their designs boiled down to this: "Germany has to fight somewhere, and she has to expand her possessions into some direction—so let her better carve out an empire for herself at the expense of the states situated in Eastern, Southeastern and Central Europe! Let her comfort herself with the Balkans or the Ukraine, but leave Britain and France in peace."²⁴

It is the trends Winston Churchill was so critical of that dominated Britain's foreign policy. British journalist and historian Ian Colvin pointed out that the men in charge of British foreign policy were after an understanding with Germany and that was basic to the nation's foreign policy. The

British ruling circles presented the policy of abetting fascist aggression eastward to ensure "Western security" as the "appeasement" of Germany. It gained wide currency in Britain in 1935, Colvin stated.²⁵

Subsequently Britain had to pay dearly for that policy of aiding and abetting the resurgence of the German Navy.²⁶

Along with naval discussions, Britain opened negotiations with the Nazi Reich about the conclusion of an Air Pact between the Locarno powers. On May 24, 1935, John Simon instructed British Ambassador in Berlin Eric Phipps to find out whether Hitler was prepared to start negotiations with a view to concluding that pact.²⁷ Since the German Air Force was still materially weaker than that of Britain, France and their allies and, besides, to have concluded such an agreement would have been tantamount to Britain and France recognising Germany's right to have an Air Force (she was banned from doing so by the Treaty of Versailles), the Nazi Reich found the signing of the Air Pact to be of much benefit to it. It gave an affirmative answer immediately and submitted its own proposals.²⁸

Britain's interest in a Western Air Pact was due to the fact that the information she had obtained about the rapid growth of the German Air Force caused her to fear that in a few years she might well face a German air invasion. Under the Air Pact, France, Italy and Belgium were to have come out at her side in such a case. Besides it was hoped in London that the signing of the Western Air Pact would be a big stride forward towards concluding a "general settlement" with Germany.

The major point of Air Pact for France in the military sense was that it guaranteed her instant aid from Britain in case of a German attack,²⁹ whereas under the Locarno Pact Britain was obliged to aid her only after the appropriate decision by the League of Nations. But still there was a great deal of apprehension in Paris. It was the German Land Force, rather than the Air Force, that posed the main danger to France. She was interested also in concluding the Eastern and Danubian pacts. It was believed in Paris, and not without good reason, that in the event of a Western Air Pact being signed along with the signing of the Anglo-German naval agreement, Britain would lose all interest in other problems of paramount importance to the security of France. All that complicated and dragged out the talks.

The facts just cited provide striking evidence of British diplomatic activity in pursuit of wide-ranging agreement with Germany. But the contradictions in Western Europe had grown so sharp as to make agreement between them extremely difficult and even impossible, as the subsequent events showed.

Italy Attacks Ethiopia

Fascist Italy set course for aggression to join Japan and Germany in this club in the mid-1930s. She had, potentially, less strength than the two other major aggressors. But by its very essence, Italian fascism was no less aggressive. The leader of Italian fascism, Mussolini, openly extolled war as mankind's natural state.

Italy picked Ethiopia, an independent, but militarily weak African state as a target for her expansionist ambitions. Mussolini proclaimed his aim to be the destruction of the Ethiopian Armed Forces and the full conquest of Ethiopia. In December 1934, the Italians provoked an armed clash between Italian and Ethiopian troops at the Wal-Wal Fort. That was the forerunner of an impending storm.

While preparing to attack Ethiopia Mussolini decided to get France neutralised by concluding an imperialist deal with her to divide their spheres of influence in Africa. That deal was struck by Laval and Mussolini in Rome on January 7, 1935. Laval agreed to turn over to Italy some of the French colonial territories bordering on Italian colonies in Africa, in exchange for the Italian fascists' promise to maintain friendly relations and consult France in international affairs.* He promised to Mussolini not to interfere with his designs on Ethiopia.³⁰

According to the information obtained by the Soviet Ambassador to France, V. P. Potemkin, from the French Ambassador to Italy, Charles Chambrun, Laval had told Mus-

* Laval hoped that in virtue of that agreement with Italy, France would be in a position to transfer 18 divisions from the Italian to the German frontier, and that additional show of force on the Rhine would deter Hitler from taking any action in the West and set his steps upon a Drang nach Osten (F. Birkenhead, *Halifax. The Life of Lord Halifax*, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1966, p. 343).

solini that France had no political interests in Ethiopia and that she would not object to the Italians reaching agreement with Ethiopia to establish Italy's virtual protectorate over that country.³¹

During the conference at Stresa in April 1935, the British representatives, in their turn, also made it quite clear to the Italians that they would not stand in the way of their capturing Ethiopia, although the British government had enough forces and resources to forestall the Italian aggression. For example, it could have prevented the shipment of Italian troops through the Suez Canal. That alone would have thwarted Italy's aggressive plans.

An inter-departmental committee, which was set up to identify the course for the British government to follow, issued a report on June 18, 1935, pointing out that Italy's action did not affect such vital interests of Britain in and round Ethiopia "as would make it essential for His Majesty's Government to resist an Italian conquest of Ethiopia".³² With this verdict to go by, the British government also started conniving at Italian aggression.

The Italian intelligence service obtained all of its secret information about the policy of the British government through the British Embassy in Rome. For five prewar years, the British Embassy in Rome was a "sieve through which official secrets filtered to Mussolini and Hitler".³³ Therefore, Mussolini knew very well that the British government expressed no particular concern over his plans to bring Ethiopia under Italian domination.

Having virtually made sure of the consent of France and Britain, Italy began concentrating her forces near the Ethiopian frontiers. Ethiopia appealed to the League of Nations for help. Although the Soviet Union had no diplomatic relations with Ethiopia at the time, the Soviet delegation consistently spoke up in the League of Nations for faithful observance of the terms of its Covenant related to the provision of aid to a victim of aggression. The People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs of the USSR Litvinov declared at a session of the Council of the League of Nations on September 5 that the Council had no right to disregard the conflict, thereby giving Italy a "free hand". That would amount to a violation of their commitments by members of the League and a breach of the Covenant of that international organisation, while strict observance of the Covenant was es-

sential to the stability of the entire edifice of international peace and security. The People's Commissar called on the Council to spare no effort and no resources in order to avert an armed conflict and fulfil the obligations which were the "League's *raison d'être*".³⁴

Speaking in the Assembly of the League of Nations on September 14, Litvinov set forth, in particular, the Soviet Union's attitude to the colonial policy of the imperialist powers in general. The Soviet government, he declared, is opposed, as a matter of principle, to the system of colonies and to the imperialist policy of spheres of influence. He stressed that the Soviet government attached paramount importance to whether or not the League of Nations would actually become an instrument of peace. That instrument of peace, he pointed out, might well come handy in the future too. Litvinov called on the members of the League to pledge themselves to allow no more encroachments on its Covenant as an instrument of peace, but use it in all cases of aggression, from whatever quarter.³⁵ In a telegramme to the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, Litvinov emphasised that "the very fact of the League applying serious sanctions against Italy will be a formidable warning for Germany as well".³⁶

The Soviet government's appeal for effective action to be taken to make fascist Italy's aggression against Ethiopia impossible was not supported, however, by other members of the League of Nations, notably by Britain and France.

The British Foreign Secretary, Samuel Hoare, assured the Assembly that the British government maintained its loyalty to the League of Nations and to the principles of collective security. He declared that Great Britain was ready to fulfil her obligations under the Covenant of the League but qualified this statement by saying that all the measures to be taken had to be collective.³⁷ Even British historians admitted that the speech did contain "a great deal of bluff, not to say duplicity", because no one in London set any particular store by the League of Nations, let alone by its application of sanctions.³⁸ Henry Channon also pointed out in his diaries: "Britain has asked the League for sanctions which, she knows, will never be given, and we have saved our face."³⁹

The French Foreign Minister, Laval turned out to be the best assistant of the Italian aggressors. Litvinov pointed out

that Laval was defending Italy's interests in the League better than the Italians themselves did it. Laval's position, the People's Commissar reported to Moscow, will have the effect of "playing down the League's prestige and encouraging Mussolini's aggressiveness".⁴⁰

When it became obvious that France and a number of capitalist countries would hardly agree to take an effective part in action against the Italian aggressors, somebody in the West began to "prompt" the Soviet Union that it could just as well come out against Italy single-handed. Naturally, the USSR could not fling itself into such a venture. The Soviet Union was prepared to play its part in good faith in *collective* sanctions. Should, however, the USSR have started to oppose the Italian aggressors alone, it could have found itself in an extremely precarious situation.

No sooner had the Assembly of the League of Nations risen on October 3, 1935, than Italy attacked Ethiopia. The Soviet Union lost no time in speaking out in support of the victim of the aggression and for collective action by members of the League of Nations to curb it. *Pravda* in a leading article "War in East Africa" on October 5, underlined the tremendous danger of a new "devastating world imperialist shambles". Having denounced Italy's intention to turn Ethiopia into her colony by means of war, *Pravda* pointed out: "The position of the Soviet Union is well known—it is one of consistent defence of the peace and freedom of the nations. Our proletarian state is opposed to the imperialist ambitions of Italian fascism."

The Council of the League of Nations met for an emergency session at short notice. On October 7, the Council found Italy guilty of aggression. It decided also on economic and financial sanctions to be applied against Italy, particularly on an embargo on the export of war equipment to Italy.

As to the military sanctions, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Britain and France, Samuel Hoare and Pierre Laval agreed that they would oppose military sanctions.⁴¹

Soviet diplomacy vigorously insisted in the League of Nations on the need for the strict fulfilment of the provisions of the Covenant concerning action to control aggression. Speaking at the emergency session of the Council of the League of Nations on October 10, the Soviet representative V. P. Potemkin declared that "the USSR considers

it to be its duty to reaffirm its readiness to fulfil all obligations, together with the other members of the League of Nations, which its Covenant imposes on all of them without exception." He emphasised that the unity of action by the members of the League was the surest means of curbing the Italian aggression against Ethiopia. Such unity of action could serve as a gage, Potemkin stressed, of the early achievement of collective security which could forestall "further attempts from whatever quarter to break the general peace". He called for "collective and determined" action.⁴² The USSR consistently carried out all the decisions of the League of Nations concerning sanctions.

The Soviet government's official position was set out also in the note issued on November 22 by the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs in reply to the note from the Italian Embassy in Moscow objecting to the decisions taken by the League of Nations. The government of the USSR pointed out that "while consistently abiding by the policy of peace, it considered it necessary for the obligations it has had assumed under the Covenant of the League of Nations to be faithfully carried out. It could not agree, the note said, that Ethiopia "must be an exception and that she must not enjoy all those rights which have been granted by the League of Nations to the rest of its members . . . A different line of conduct would amount to repudiating the fundamental principles of the League of Nations, renouncing collective organisation of security, encouraging aggression and rejecting the possibility of demonstrating international solidarity in maintaining and strengthening world peace, which is the bedrock principle of the policy of the Soviet Government."⁴³

The so-called oil sanctions against Italy were of particular significance in action against Italian aggression. She had no oil resources of her own and to have cut off oil supplies for Italy would have virtually made it impossible for the Italian aggression to continue. The USSR and some other petroleum-exporting countries were prepared to stop exporting petroleum products to Italy. But for the oil sanctions to be effective, they had to be applied by all petroleum-exporting countries. The position of the United States was of particular importance under the circumstances. However, the U.S. government refused to cut off oil exports to Italy. And so did France.⁴⁴

Since Britain could have played an enormous role in opposing the Italian aggression, the Soviet government tried to come to terms with the British government about that. On instructions from Moscow, the Soviet Ambassador in London I. M. Maisky met the British Foreign Secretary Samuel Hoare on November 6, 1935. The Ambassador told him that Italy was a relatively weak aggressor. Other prospective aggressors were stronger and more dangerous. "We consider it extremely important," he stressed, "for Italy to be used as an example to teach a lesson to all possible aggressors in general."⁴⁵

The matter was thoroughly examined at a British Cabinet meeting on December 2. Some of its members expressed the apprehension lest the application of effective (oil or any other) sanctions against Italy should have caused the fascist regime in that country to collapse altogether with the result that Mussolini "would probably disappear from Italian politics and there might be a Communist Government in Italy and a complete alteration in the whole European situation". Therefore, the British Foreign Secretary Samuel Hoare went out of his way to prove that it was necessary to postpone the application of oil sanctions while pressing, in co-operation with Laval for "peace negotiations" to be opened as soon as possible. Hoare's proposals were approved by the Cabinet.⁴⁶

The so-called Hoare-Laval agreement, whereby France and Britain expressed their consent to one-third of the territory of Ethiopia being annexed by Italy, was concluded on December 8, 1935. When the agreement came before the British Cabinet meeting later in the day, it was pointed out that it was extremely advantageous to the aggressor—Italy, and virtually unacceptable to the victim of the aggression, that is, Ethiopia. Nevertheless, the agreement was unanimously approved by the British government and it was decided to exercise "strong pressure" on Ethiopia to make her comply with the demands contained in the Hoare-Laval agreement.⁴⁷

Emperor Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia was ready to betray the interests of his people. On February 19, 1936, he sent a top secret message through the British military attaché in Ethiopia to the British government to announce his readiness, first, to open negotiations with the Italian government, and second, "to tie Ethiopia to England either in

the form of a protectorate or in the form of a mandate".⁴⁸ The latter proposal turned out, however, to be unacceptable to Britain since the incorporation of Ethiopia in the British Empire under the circumstances of the day would have automatically put Britain into a state of war against Italy.

The Hoare-Laval agreement was so odious that it was kept top secret, yet its substance leaked into the press, touching off a storm of indignation in Britain and outside. Samuel Hoare had to step down as Foreign Secretary but that did not mean any change in the British government's policies. Britain and France went on favouring the Italian aggressors.

So did the United States, albeit in a different form. On August 31, 1935, the House of Representatives and the Senate of the U.S. Congress adopted a joint resolution to ban arms sales to belligerent nations. That started the notorious neutrality legislation which was to play so negative a role on the eve of the war. The position taken up by the United States was virtually playing into the aggressor's hands. Italy was making all types of weapons herself. The victim of the aggression—Ethiopia, having no munitions industry at all, had to buy weapons and ammunition abroad. The American market, however, was now closed to her.

The half-and-half sanctions announced by the League of Nations could not deter the aggressors. In spite of Ethiopia's stiff resistance, Italian troops, resorting to the most bestial methods of warfare up to and including the use of poison gases, succeeded in defeating the Ethiopians. With Ethiopia annexed, Mussolini pompously proclaimed Italy an empire in May 1936.

Reporting to the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs about his conversation on the matter with D. Lloyd George, I. M. Maisky wrote that Lloyd George cursed Prime Minister S. Baldwin and his ministers in the strongest terms he could find, insisting that should a policy of sanctions against Italy have been applied consistently from the very outset, Ethiopia would have remained intact and "a formidable precedent could have been created for any future aggressor, including Germany".⁴⁹

The defeat of Ethiopia by Italy was a direct consequence of the policy of connivance at aggression pursued by Britain, France and the United States and a result of their imperialist collusion with the Italian aggressors. It was hoped

in London and Paris that in case of an amicable agreement with Italy at Ethiopia's expense, the conclusion of a Four Power Pact could have been tried again.

The Soviet Union was the only one of the Great Powers to speak up consistently in support of Ethiopia's just national liberation war. Britain and France, having failed to intervene in behalf of Ethiopia, left the League of Nations itself in sorry plight. From then on this organisation ceased to play any more or less essential role in international affairs. Small nations of Europe, which had earlier counted on the League of Nations supporting them in case of aggression against them, were coming round to the conclusion that it was not to be relied on. The plans for developing the League of Nations into an effective instrument of collective security were hit hard. At the same time, the aggressive powers came to the conclusion that they did not have to be afraid of that organisation any longer. All that did irreparable damage to the cause of peace.

German Troops Moved into Rhineland

Nazi Germany followed Italy in striking out at peace and the security of the nations. She decided to make short shrift of the provision of the 1925 Treaty of Locarno whereby Germany had pledged herself to have no troops on the left bank of the Rhine and inside a 50-km strip along the right bank (these restrictions were imposed by the Peace Treaty of Versailles). For Germany the whole point of that action was, above all, that by building military fortifications in that region, she would have made extremely difficult an invasion by French forces, should France have decided to come to the aid of her allies in Central and Eastern Europe in case of German aggression against them. At the same time it was a kind of test for Hitler to see how Britain and France would behave in similar circumstances at a later date.⁵⁰

The French Ambassador in Berlin André François-Poncet stated on February 4, 1936, that the Nazis were increasingly vocal and their claims increasingly defiant. What was emerging into the foreground with growing evidence was their fanaticism, the spirit of domination, the persistent striving for revenge and the theories of racial superiority.

Plans for establishing German hegemony in the Danubian region were being hatched and colonialist demands made.⁵¹

The British government, too, realised the whole complexity of the situation. On January 17, 1936, the new British Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden submitted a circumstantial memorandum "The German Danger" to the government containing a wealth of indisputable evidence of the Nazi Reich's aggressive designs. However, Eden's idea was not to oppose the danger of aggression from Germany, but "to consider whether it is still possible to come to some *modus vivendi* . . . with Hitler's Germany".⁵²

The Foreign Office Central Department Chief, William Strang urged in a memorandum he had prepared on the subject that some far-reaching concessions should be made to Germany so as to "deprive her of an excuse" for acts of violence. He considered it possible to agree to Germany establishing her economic domination of Central and South-east Europe. The Foreign Office economic adviser, F. Ashton-Gwatkin called for giving her financial support to the same end along with allowing her an access to sources of raw materials, and perhaps, even returning some of her former colonies to her; giving Germany a free hand in developing her economic relations with the countries of Central and Southeast Europe; and economic co-operation of Britain and Germany, for instance, in the exploitation of the natural resources of Russia.⁵³

The question of a possible occupation of the demilitarised Rhineland by German troops became one of particular relevance at the time. The matter was considered by the British government back in January 1935 when it was decided that "demilitarisation of the Rhineland was not a vital British interest".⁵⁴ At the same time, as Foreign Office records indicate, it was realised perfectly well in London that as a result of that action "the Russians, Poles and Czechs will find their alliances with France materially depreciated". But that did not worry the British ruling circles too much. On the contrary, they showed a clear interest in having those alliances scrapped to make it easier for the Nazis to expand eastwards.

Once informed, on March 5, 1936, about the occupation of the Rhineland the Nazis had planned to begin in a matter of days, the British government re-examined the issue in detail. All opposition to that action was out of the question.

Anthony Eden urged the immediate resumption of negotiations with Germany. He called for talks to be opened with her about an Air Pact before proceeding to discuss the abolition of the demilitarised Rhineland zone and other problems.⁵⁵ On the following day Anthony Eden invited German Ambassador L. Hoersch and, declaring himself for Anglo-Franco-German co-operation, proposed the conclusion of an Air Pact as the first question to take up. On hearing such an offer, the Nazis felt themselves definitely assured that there was no reason to fear any opposition from London and Paris to the Reich's action in respect of the Rhineland. The "reply" to that offer had been framed by the Nazi Reich in advance.

The demilitarised Rhineland zone was occupied by Germany on March 7, 1935. The German government demagogically declared that it was not under obligation to honour the terms of the 1925 Treaty of Locarno because of France's ratification of the Treaty of Mutual Assistance with the USSR.

To soften the reaction of other nations, the Nazis came forward with a statement of their "commitment to peace". They expressed their readiness to conclude a non-aggression treaty with France and Belgium instead of the Pact of Locarno and also to consider bringing Germany back into the League of Nations.

The violation of the existing treaties by the Nazi Reich and the consolidation of its strategic positions constituted an immense danger to the cause of peace and security in Europe. The Soviet Union, guiding itself consistently as it did by the interests of peace in its foreign policy, lost no time in roundly condemning the aggressive action by the Nazi chieftains. A leading article in *Izvestia* on March 14, 1936, stressed that the USSR "is opposed to the violation of the Treaty of Locarno by Germany, which cannot but increase the danger of war".

The invasion of the demilitarised Rhineland by German troops was a serious test for France to pass. The French ruling elements did not want to resist Hitler's venture, although they had every opportunity to do so. France was militarily the strongest state in Western Europe at the time. Germany, on the other hand, had just started to create her major armed forces. So it was by no accident at all that the German units entering the Rhineland should have got

an order to withdraw to their starting positions forthwith in the face of any counter-measures by France.

The French government could also have resorted to collective sanctions, with reliance, among other things, on the Treaty of Mutual Assistance with the USSR. On March 7, 1936, the French Foreign Minister communicated to Soviet Ambassador Potemkin that, with German forces in the Rhineland zone, the French government called for the Council of the League of Nations to meet, and hoped that the USSR would give its full backing to France in it.⁵⁶ On March 9, 1936, the Ambassador, acting on instructions from the Soviet government, replied that France could rely, wholly and entirely, on support from the Soviet Union in the League of Nations.⁵⁷ French diplomats highly appreciated that expression of solidarity.⁵⁸

A number of France's allies among the small nations of Europe, such as Belgium or Czechoslovakia, also declared themselves ready to help her, since they realised that the matter at issue was, to all intents and purposes, one of their own fate.

France's ruling circles understood perfectly well that her position was crucial at the moment to the subsequent external political orientation of all of those countries because in the event of a German victory in the impending conflict, they could defect into the victor's camp. "The question now being decided," said one of the documents of Quai d'Orsay, "is whether Europe will be German or not."⁵⁹ Representatives of the French ruling establishment, although they did make some threatening speeches, were hesitant in actual fact and did not make bold to take more or less drastic action by way of resisting the aggressors.

The British government found it necessary to discourage any military action by France against Germany.⁶⁰ It insisted on France taking no steps pending a conference of the Locarno powers and the consideration of the matter at issue in the Council of the League of Nations. The only thing that preoccupied London, rather than that of fighting the aggressive policies of Germany, was that of sitting down again with Nazis at one table as soon as possible. An effort to find ways towards agreement with the Third Reich was launched by the British Cabinet Foreign Policy Committee consisting of the Premier and most influential ministers, which was set up at about that time. The British raised the

question of concluding a new Pact of Locarno while dropping all reference to the demilitarisation of the Rhineland. The members of the committee showed themselves to be keen, too, on the question of bringing Germany back into the League of Nations.⁶¹ The problem of giving Germany back her former colonies was carefully studied.

The British Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Robert Cranborne took the matter up with the Soviet Ambassador. He pointed out that the British government "would like to restore the old Locarno without the demilitarised Rhineland". Maisky objected to London's intentions and declared that "the only worthy reply to Hitler would be by an all-round consolidation of collective security, including some measures of repression against Germany which the League of Nations would consider possible".⁶²

One of the basic reasons behind such a position of the British ruling quarters was the fear that a policy aimed at resisting Hitler might crush fascism and establish Bolshevism.⁶³

A conference of the Locarno powers (Britain, France, Italy and Belgium), without Germany, however, among them, opened in Paris on March 10, 1936. It produced no positive results whatsoever. It was decided to refer the matter to the Council of the League of Nations. The British representatives succeeded in getting the Council to meet in London this time, rather than in Geneva, and to have representatives of Germany invited to it. That was a clear effort to come to terms with the Nazi Reich rather than oppose its violation of the existing treaties.

As it considered, on March 11, the situations thus shaping up, the British government, on Anthony Eden's motion, opposed all sanctions against Germany and urged the resumption of talks with her to achieve an understanding.⁶⁴

At a League of Nations session on March 14, the British government did all it could to prevent any sanctions being applied against the Nazi Reich. British diplomats argued that to have broken some treaties did not yet mean aggression. The Soviet People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, in London for the Council's deliberations, cabled to Moscow his own observations of the mood in the British capital. He reported that "the British are trying to involve the French in the talks with Hitler as soon as possible."⁶⁵

At a meeting of the Council on March 17, the People's Commissar reaffirmed the readiness of the Soviet Union to express—together with the other Council member-countries their common disgust at Germany's violation of her international commitments, condemn her action and join in using the "most effective means of preventing any similar violations in the future". While denouncing Hitler's Germany for having broken the treaties she had signed, the People's Commissar criticised the policy of connivance at such moves. He opposed the collective surrender to the aggressor and the collective rewarding of the aggressor by taking decisions to suit and benefit him, and the decisions which, on the grounds of avoiding an imaginary danger of war today, would be creating the requisites for a real war tomorrow.⁶⁶

The Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, V. M. Molotov also confirmed that "all the aid essential to France in case of a possible attack . . . would be offered by the Soviet Union."⁶⁷ The Soviet Union's adamant stand on the matter arose from its persistent effort for peace and collective security. It was realised quite well in the Soviet Union that one could not work for peace without working to uphold the inviolability of international commitments. It was impossible to assure collective security without taking collective measures against the violations of the existing treaties.

Still British diplomacy managed to get the Council of the League of Nations to limit itself to stating the fact of Germany having broken her treaty obligations. No sanctions against her were applied, and that decision suited the Nazis perfectly well because their action remained unpunished.

Reporting to the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs about the views and moods in British government quarters, the Soviet Embassy in London pointed out that these could be summed up as attempts to keep Britain's military commitments limited to France and Belgium and, eventually, to seek an accommodation with Germany.⁶⁸ While counting on the conclusion of a new pact with Germany to guarantee once again the so-called "Western security", the British government was ready to leave the nations and peoples of Eastern and Central Europe at the mercy of the Nazis. That was the policy which, as we shall yet see, subsequently led to the Munich sell-out and then to war.

France followed in Britain's footsteps in treading the

same path of danger to the cause of peace. The French Foreign Minister P. Flandin, setting out the basic principles of his country's foreign policy in the circumstances that had emerged after March 7, 1936, declared: "We shall have to make the best terms with Germany we can get, and leave the rest of Europe to her fate."⁶⁹ A mere four years later that policy brought France to her defeat and disgraceful surrender.

The search of accommodation among the Western powers, and on the anti-Soviet grounds at that, had the support of the reactionary circles of the United States. For example, the U.S. Ambassador in Paris, Bullitt, urged "reconciliation between France and Germany" in opposition to the USSR.⁷⁰

By the remilitarisation of the Rhineland the Nazi Reich strengthened its strategic position for further acts of aggression. As a matter of urgency, the Nazis set about putting up the so-called Ziegfried Line along the German-French border. The Nazi Reich sought to reinforce its rear to launch aggressive action in Central and Eastern Europe. At the same time the Ziegfried Line was to serve as the starting point for a subsequent invasion of France.

France's positions in Europe were badly undermined, and so was her allies' confidence in her. The remilitarisation of the Rhineland by the Nazis signified that in the event of the Nazi Reich attacking France's allies in Central and Eastern Europe, she would now find it far more difficult to help them out by full-scale action on the Western Front. It was precisely at that time that the French ruling quarters definitely embraced the concept that in the event of the Third Reich attacking France's allies, the French Army would stick to a defensive strategy, that is, sit it out behind the Maginot Line. The Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, Molotov, pointed out in an interview with the editor of the French *Le Temps* newspaper Chastenot on March 19, 1936: "The remilitarisation of the Rhine Region has, certainly, intensified the threat to the nations east of Germany, notably, the USSR. It would be wrong to fail to see that".⁷¹ The Soviet-French Treaty of Mutual Assistance, even not in force as yet, was losing much of its significance as a military-strategic factor.

While urging the French government to resign itself to the acts committed by the Nazi Reich, Britain expressed her willingness to assume certain obligations in relation to

France. On April 1, the governments of Britain and France exchanged official letters whereby the British government declared that should the attempts at concluding a new agreement involving Germany, instead of Treaty of Locarno, prove fruitless, Britain would come to France's aid in the event of a German attack on her. As the British-French military negotiations, which followed soon afterwards, showed, the British government had no serious intention, in fact, to lend any effective military assistance to France. Those commitments of Britain's did no more than create the impression that France could rely on her support. In actual fact, there was no reason at all for France to count on any British aid to speak of.

Subversion Against the League of Nations

With the danger of war growing, the Soviet government found it necessary to renew its attempts at rallying the forces of the nations which were the targets of German and Italian aggression. The Soviet Union was pressing for the consolidation of the League of Nations and for making it more effective in preventing war and keeping the peace. The Soviet Union proceeded in advancing its proposals from the assumption that the overall military and economic strength as well as the manpower resources of the non-aggressor nations were by far superior to any possible combination of aggressive powers at the time. It would have been enough for the non-aggressor nations to unite and to demonstrate the possibility for their joint action for peace, for the war danger to be averted and the security of all nations strengthened.

The Soviet government attached special importance to co-operation with France and Britain in various areas, including the League of Nations. It is worth mentioning in this context the negotiations which took place early in 1936, notably, during the visit of Litvinov and Marshal Tukhachevsky to London (for the funeral of King George V), as well as the Soviet Ambassador's conversa-

tions with British statesmen in London. Soviet Ambassador in London, Maisky conferred with British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden on this subject on January 11, 1936. Informing the British Ambassador in Moscow about it Anthony Eden wrote: "As to general policy, Mr. Maisky maintained that the essential thing was that His Majesty's Government, the Soviet Government and the French Government should work together in leadership of the League. If they did that and if they used every opportunity to strengthen the League and if they remained firm, he believed that the German menace might be met at last without war... That was why his Government attached such great importance to our close co-operation."⁷²

Litvinov's conversation with Anthony Eden on January 30 was even more important. The British Foreign Secretary wrote about it: "Mr. Litvinov emphasised his anxiety to do everything in his power to improve relations between our two countries. Was there not any further step that could be taken? If so, he would welcome it. I replied that I could think of nothing new... Mr. Litvinov... asked... was it not possible, for instance, to conceive of some agreement between Soviet Russia, France and the United Kingdom? I replied that I could not visualise how this could be possible."⁷³ On February 5 Maisky talked it over, besides, with British Secretary for War A. Duff Cooper.⁷⁴

On April 2, 1936, the Soviet Ambassador informed the Foreign Office that in the opinion of the Soviet government, to save Europe, "it is extremely necessary to establish closer co-operation between the USSR, France and Great Britain in the battle for peace." He pointed out that "only an urgent consolidation of collective security, ready to meet any further aggression by Germany with resolute action, could bring it home to Hitler that peace is more profitable, after all, than war".⁷⁵

The Soviet government's initiative was not supported by Britain's ruling establishment. They sought agreement with the Nazi Reich rather than with the Soviet Union. The Foreign Office believed that they should by no means discuss Anglo-Franco-Soviet co-operation with Maisky, so as not to compromise the negotiations with Germany.⁷⁶ Even the West German historian A. Kuhn pointed out that "the British ambition to come to terms with anti-communist states hindered all intensification of Anglo-Soviet relations."⁷⁷

The considerations which the British top leadership proceeded from in opposing the idea of co-operation with the Soviet Union could be summed up as follows.

Should insurmountable obstacles have been raised in the way of the German aggressors, that would have meant assuring peace not only for Britain but for the Soviet Union as well. But while the British Conservatives wanted peace for Britain, they, guided by their class considerations, by no means wanted to have the Soviet Union live in peace, going ahead with the construction of its new, socialist type of society.

If, with Britain, France, and the USSR in alliance, things would still have come to the point of war, Nazi Germany would have inevitably been defeated. But for the same class considerations, such a victory did not suit the British Conservatives either, since the Soviet Union would have been among the victor powers, that is to say, not only would it have continued to exist but it could even have strengthened its position in the world. Besides, it was taken into account in London that the war could have led to socialist revolutions breaking out in a number of capitalist countries.

This can well be seen from a statement made by British Premier Baldwin in 1936. He said that in the event of an armed conflict, Britain "might succeed in crushing Germany with the aid of Russia, but it would probably only result in Germany going Bolshevik".⁷⁸

The rulers of the British Empire had worked out their own general strategic plan providing for an imperialist collusion between Great Britain and the Nazi Reich. In return for the Nazi pledge not to encroach on the British Empire London was ready to grant Nazi Germany the "right" to aggression eastwards in the hope of eventually pushing her into a war against the Soviet Union. It was expected in London that the security of the British Empire would thus be ensured, and the Soviet Union would be destroyed or, at any rate, weakened, and that Nazi Germany, Britain's major imperialist rival, would be extenuated, too.

British Premier Baldwin said in 1936, setting out his views on the subject: "We all know the German desire, and he (Hitler) has come out with it in his book, to move East and if he should move East it should not break my heart..."

If there is any fighting in Europe to be done, I should like to see the Bolsheviks and the Nazis doing it."⁷⁹

That course of the British Conservatives ran counter to the national interests of Britain and the British people. It was fraught with the most serious consequences for Britain (it proved to be one of the essential causes behind the outbreak of the Second World War).

The British Ambassador in Moscow, Lord Chilton found it necessary to warn the Foreign Office that, in spite of all good will of the USSR and its desire for co-operation with Britain, this policy of London could eventually have unfavourable consequences for it. He wrote that the Soviet government's policy was to secure collective action to deter Germany; but should it find that all of its attempts at safeguarding its own security in that way were to no avail, it could reverse its policy towards Germany and opt for the normalisation of relations with her.⁸⁰

Although there were serious difficulties to surmount—because of that policy of Britain's ruling circles—in strengthening the security of Europe, the Soviet Union continued to do everything possible, on its part, to rally all the nations objectively interested in the maintenance of peace.

The Soviet government still considered the United States' participation in the promotion of peace most important. The U.S. Chargé d'Affaires in the USSR, L. Henderson, commenting on Molotov's report to the Central Executive Committee in a dispatch to the Department of State on January 11, 1936, laid accent on the passage which referred to the need for closer relations between the Soviet Union and the United States which, as Molotov pointed out, "has enormous significance from the point of view of the preservation of general peace". This statement and the conversation with the Soviet Ambassador in Washington, A. A. Troyanovsky, who had arrived in Moscow, had given enough reason to Henderson to tell the Department of State that the Soviet government was counting on U.S. aid in creating a system of collective security. On April 17, W. Bullitt reported to Washington about his conversation with Litvinov who had emphasised the importance of joint efforts by the U.S. and the USSR "in the interest of peace". According to Bullitt, Litvinov was inclined to think that should a war break out in the West, that would be a war of Germany against France, and Japan would not attack the USSR

alone, without Germany. Therefore, showing concern not only for its own country, but for general peace, the Soviet government offered the United States to share in a collective effort to strengthen the security of the peoples. Yet Washington showed no interest in these proposals.⁸¹

Speaking on July 1 and September 28, 1936, about action to promote peace in the Assembly of the League of Nations, Litvinov, under instructions from the Soviet government, declared that the only way to safeguard peace was by setting up a system of collective security. He called for the League of Nations to be transformed into a bloc of states concerned with preserving peace and united for mutual defence and assistance. We demand, he said, "that this bloc should really organise mutual assistance, that it should draw up its action plan in good time so as not to be caught napping, and that war-making activity going on outside this bloc should be effectively countered by the organisation of collective resistance".⁸²

Because not all the members of the League of Nations agreed to share in applying military sanctions against the aggressor, the Soviet government spoke up for the members of the League to conclude regional or bilateral pacts of mutual assistance. In case of the need for military sanctions to be applied, this could be done by the parties to the appropriate regional agreements and also—subject to their own desire—by other members of the League. These proposals of the Soviet government to strengthen the League of Nations were passed on to the League's Secretary-General on August 30, 1936. The Soviet government strongly opposed the proposals of certain countries for the abrogation of the Article 16 of the Covenant of the League of Nations which envisaged sanctions against an aggressor.

The steadfast effort of the USSR for peace and collective security contributed towards raising the Soviet Union's international prestige. Some remarks by the former British Premier Lloyd George, in his conversation with the Soviet Ambassador on July 1, 1936, are most indicative in this respect. The international role of the USSR, Lloyd George said, is rising. The policies of Britain and France are becoming increasingly unclear, wavering and indefinite. That, naturally, is undermining the confidence, particularly, of the medium-sized and small nations, in London and Paris. "Meanwhile, the USSR has all along been pursuing a clear-

cut and definite policy of peace." So is there anything surprising, indeed, he said, "if medium-sized and small nations are more and more taking the USSR as their guide-post and if they increasingly regard it as their own leader?"⁸³

One of the top officials in the Secretariat of the League of Nations, F. Walters pointed out in his two-volume *A History of the League of Nations* that ever since it joined the League, the USSR had been its "convinced supporter". The conduct of the USSR towards the aggressive powers was "more consistent with the Covenant than that of any other great power", and that Soviet Union played the leading part in the League as it concerned security.⁸⁴

The controversy which developed in the League at the time over the prospect of amending its Covenant, showed, however, that the League was sliding down to utter impotence and collapse. This was due, in part, to the Western powers' connivance at aggression. With reference to the matter, Maisky reported to Moscow that the major trend to be observed among the majority of Conservatives and the one shared by the British government was towards Britain's "semi isolation" in international affairs. It boiled down to a reform of the League of Nations ("pulling the League's teeth out"), that is, to the formal or actual abrogation of Article 16 of the League Covenant.⁸⁵ Because of Britain's and France's short-sighted policies, the League of Nations found itself hamstrung and incapable of safeguarding peace.

The aggressor states were out to subvert the League of Nations. Italy followed Japan's and Germany's example by leaving the League in December 1937.

Nazi Germany was pressing the small nations of Europe to boycott the League's action against the aggressors. The Nazis realised perfectly well that the consolidation of the League and the conclusion of regional pacts of mutual assistance would hamper their land-grabbing plans. Therefore, the German government wanted as many European countries as possible to declare neutrality in case of any armed conflict in Europe and refuse to participate in the application of sanctions provided for by the Covenant of the League of Nations. The Nazi Reich thus hoped to obtain an opportunity to swallow up the small nations of Europe one after the other, encountering no organised collective resistance from other states.

The Polish diplomatic service, with J. Beck at its head, lent active assistance to the Nazis in undermining the League of Nations and disuniting the countries of Eastern Europe in the face of aggression. In 1936 he put forward his idea of creating a belt of "neutral" states from the Baltic down to the Black Sea (incorporating the Baltic countries, Poland and Romania). That proposal played into Berlin's hands as it retarded the creation of a genuine system of collective security.

The British government, too, put forward some peace-endangering plans. For example, Chamberlain, addressing the British government's Foreign Policy Committee on March 10, 1937, wondered whether Germany would agree to conclude non-aggression treaties with all of her Eastern neighbours. The USSR could also have concluded such treaties with them.* Essentially, however, his suggestion was that this scheme would take the place of the Franco-Soviet pact.⁸⁶ Lord Privy Seal Lord Halifax noted there and then that he had proposed a scheme of that kind to the German Ambassador in London, Ribbentrop, back on February 11, 1937.⁸⁷

In subverting the League of Nations, the British government still attached special importance to how to do away with the Soviet-French Treaty of Mutual Assistance that was so unpalatable to it. Naturally, that had nothing in common with the consolidation of peace and security in Europe. Britain's ruling circles did achieve their aim in substance, if not in form. That was confirmed by a report from the U.S. Ambassador in Paris Bullitt to Washington about his conversation with the French head of government Camille Chautemps on December 4, 1937. Chautemps said during the meeting that he "would be quite ready to give the Germans all the assurances possible that France would never make a military alliance with the Soviet Union directed against Germany or indulge in military conversations with the Soviet Union."⁸⁸

The Soviet government considered that one of the possible useful measures towards creating a broadly-based front of struggle against aggression was the publication of a joint declaration by a number of European countries an-

* By that time the USSR had non-aggression treaties with all of its Western neighbours, except Romania.

xious for peace to be preserved.⁸⁹ So, in a conversation with the U.S. Ambassador to the USSR, Davis, on March 26, 1937, the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs stressed that it was not too late to stop the aggressors through resolute action by the peace-loving nations. The publication of a firm declaration by the non-aggressor nations of Europe that they were standing together for peace could have played an important part in keeping the peace, the People's Commissar pointed out. If the U.S. were to join in such a declaration, that would contribute towards preserving peace not only in Europe but in the Far East as well.⁹⁰ The People's Commissar more than once urged the publication of such a declaration in his negotiations with representatives of other countries.

The U.S. did not support the Soviet proposal. At the same time it is worth noting that the U.S. Ambassador in Moscow, Davis, highly appreciated the contribution which the Soviet Union could make and did make towards strengthening peace. Reporting to Washington about the role of the Soviet military potential in the course of events in Europe, he wrote on June 28, 1937: "Russia's might and strength ... are of indisputable value in deterring Hitler. . . The Russian Red Army is one of the strongest factors for peace in Europe."⁹¹

SPAIN IN FLAMES

Fascist Intervention and a Travesty of Non-Intervention

"Clear skies all over Spain"—these words broadcast by Radio Centa (Spanish Morocco) in the night of July 18, 1936, signalled a sweeping counter-revolutionary rebellion in Spain against the Popular Front government.

The uprising began to be plotted right after the elections of February 16, 1936, in which the Popular Front parties scored a major victory. They won 269 seats in the newly-elected parliament. The right-wing parties gained 157 seats, and the centre parties—48. Having been defeated at the polls, Spanish reaction set out to gain political power through violence with the backing of German and Italian fascists.

The fascist powers—Germany and Italy—were prepared to aid Spanish reaction both for political and strategic and for economic considerations. Hitler and Mussolini were extremely displeased with the consolidation of democratic forces in Spain and with the sweeping anti-fascist movement in that country. They feared that the Popular Front victory in Spain could lead to the growth of the forces of democracy and progress in other countries of Europe.

Besides, Germany and Italy counted on the victory of reactionary forces in Spain helping them reinforce their own military and strategic positions for expanding aggression. The plans which the Nazi Reich had built on the intervention in Spain were revealed in a memorandum of the German Ministry for Foreign Affairs. It pointed out that the situation in France would change radically because her Iberian frontier and lines of communication with her colonial empire would come under threat. "Gibraltar would be worthless, and the freedom of movement of the British fleet through the Straits would depend on Spain, not to mention the possibility of having submarines and light naval forces as well as the air force operating from the Iberian peninsula in all directions of the compass. A European conflict in which the Rome-Berlin Axis was aligned against England and France would take on an entirely different aspect if a strong Spain joined the Rome-Berlin Axis."⁹²

Mussolini expected that by strengthening his foothold on the Iberian peninsula he would take a big step towards restoring the Roman Empire and transforming the Mediterranean into an "Italian lake". He was already dreaming of the glory of ancient Roman emperors.

What attracted Italy and Germany also was Spain's wealth of natural resources such as coal, iron ores, mercury, tungsten, lead, etc.

War equipment from Germany and Italy streamed thick and fast into Spain soon after the outbreak of the rebellion. That was because, among other things, as State Secretary of German Ministry for Foreign Affairs Ernst von Weizsäcker pointed out in his diary, Franco, who led the fascist uprising in Spain, could not "establish his rule in Spain with his own forces alone".⁹³ Some 50 thousand German servicemen (including airmen and tankmen) were sent to Spain. The aid which Hitler gave to the Spanish rebels was estimated by German sources at 500 million marks

(200 million dollars).⁹⁴ Italy supplied 1,930 guns, 7.5 million shells, 240 thousand rifles, 325 million cartridges, 7,633 motor vehicles, 950 tanks and armoured troop carriers. Close on 1,000 Italian planes were involved in the Spanish war, having made over 86 thousand sorties and dropped 11,584 tonnes of bombs. Around 150 thousand Italian soldiers fought against the Spanish Republic. As Italy's Foreign Minister Ciano said in a conversation with Hitler, the expenses incurred by the Italian intervention in Spain amounted to 14,000 million lire (700 million dollars).⁹⁵

The British Conservatives also had all their affection for Spanish reactionaries. The class hatred of the British ruling circles for the Popular Front government was greater than their fear lest Spain should find herself, in the event of a rebel victory, in the camp of Britain's prospective military adversaries.

The diary of one of the British "die-hards", Henry Channon had an entry dated July 27 which said: "For a few days, we had hoped that they (the rebels -*Ed.*) would win, though tonight it seems as if the Red government, alas, will triumph."⁹⁶

The class sentiment of the British ruling circles proved to be particularly acute because a Popular Front government was formed also in France, following the victory of the left forces in the elections of the spring of 1936. If the infection of Communism, the British Conservative *Daily Mail* wrote, now spreading in Spain and France, overflows into other countries, the two governments—German and Italian—which had killed this infection on their own soil would turn out to be our most useful friends.⁹⁷ The British government considered it undesirable to render even the least support to the legitimate government of Spain or somehow handicap the action of the Spanish rebels.

The British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden pointed out in a conversation with the Soviet Ambassador that a Franco victory would not be much of a danger to British interests.⁹⁸ Neither did Winston Churchill conceal in his conversation with the Soviet Ambassador that Franco's victory was, in his opinion a "lesser evil" than the victory of the Republican government of Spain.⁹⁹ In Paris, meanwhile, the British Ambassador made no bones of Britain's sympathy for the rebels.¹⁰⁰

The French government of the day was headed by Leon Blum, the right-wing socialist leader who, in fact, shared the British Conservatives' policy with regard to Spain. On July 25, 1936, the Blum government banned arms deliveries to Spain and ordered the French border with Spain to be closed. In common with the British "die-hards", Blum was striving for an "appeasement" of Germany and for a Franco-German rapprochement. On September 12, 1936, the Soviet Ambassador to France, V. P. Potemkin, reported to the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs that the aggravation of the internal situation in the country, the Spanish events, Britain's indecision and the Germany's growing might were strengthening in Franco the "trend towards an accommodation with Germany... Anti-Soviet sentiment is seen growing."¹⁰¹ French politicians G. Bonnet and G. Mandel admitted in a conversation with Potemkin that the Blum government toed the British line in seeking agreement with Germany.¹⁰²

Barely half a year after the Soviet-French treaty of non-aggression came into effect, the French government started to consider getting rid of it. The French Foreign Minister Yvon Delbos said in November 1936 that "the chief aim of the French-Russian agreement was to draw Germany away from Soviet Russia, that is, to counteract a possible renewal of the Rapallo policy". At present the signing of the German-Japanese Anti-Comintern Pact "definitely cancelled such a possibility. Therefore, the attitude of the French government toward an agreement with Russia might also be subject to certain alteration." Delbos maintained that there was a majority opinion in France in favour of mutual understanding with Germany.¹⁰³

U.S. policy with respect to the Spanish issue differed but outwardly from that of Britain and France. Whereas the British and French governments pursued a policy of "non-intervention", that of the United States adhered to the policy of isolationism. The U.S. neutrality legislation was extended to cover Spain on January 7, 1937. That went far towards complicating the position of the Republican government for it deprived that government of an opportunity to buy war equipment in the United States. The best evidence to that effect was provided by this statement of Franco: "Neutrality legislation ... the quick manner in which it was passed and carried into effect—is a gesture we, na-

tionists, will never forget." ¹⁰⁴ The fascist press rejoiced in this indication that "American neutrality means German-Italian domination of Spain", ¹⁰⁵ the U.S. Ambassador in Berlin William E. Dodd stated.

Due to persistent efforts by Britain and France, 27 nations of Europe concluded an agreement on non-intervention in the affairs of Spain in August 1936. A Non-Intervention Committee started to function in London in compliance with this agreement. The Soviet Union agreed to take part in its work at the request of France. The Soviet government guided itself, in so doing, by a desire to localise the civil war in Spain, to prevent it escalating into a world war. At the same time the Soviet Union proceeded from the assumption that without foreign intervention, the Spanish people, who were, as the election had shown, in their majority at the side of the legitimate Republican government, could uphold their democratic gains and bar the way to reaction and obscurantism. The Soviet representative in the London-based Non-Intervention Committee in the affairs of Spain had instructions, notably, to try to hamper arms supplies to Spanish rebels and press for strict control over the action of Germany, Italy and Portugal. ¹⁰⁶

The participation in the Committee gave the Soviet government a chance of upholding the interests of the Spanish Republic in it, preventing it from taking any decisions likely to infringe its legitimate rights and interests and expose the German and Italian invaders.

Soviet Aid to the Spanish People

The Soviet government faithfully honoured the agreement on non-intervention. But when it became obvious that Italy and Germany were rendering all possible military aid to the Spanish rebels, the Soviet Union issued a warning on October 7, 1936, that, unless the violations of the agreement on non-intervention were stopped, the USSR would consider itself free from obligations arising from that agreement. ¹⁰⁷

However, military supplies for the rebels from Germany and Italy, far from ending, went on expanding. Under those circumstances, the Soviet government came forward with a new statement on October 23. It pointed out that the

agreement on non-intervention had turned into a scrap of paper and was virtually null and void. Having no desire to be a party to that unfair business, the statement said, the Soviet government saw but one way out of the prevailing situation and that was by restoring the government of Spain's right and opportunity to buy arms. The Soviet Union pointed out that "it cannot consider itself bound by the agreement on non-intervention any more than any of the other parties to this agreement". ¹⁰⁸

The Soviet position of principle as regards the Spanish Republic was set out in a letter of December 24, 1936, from J. V. Stalin, V. M. Molotov and K. Y. Voroshilov to the Spanish head of government Largo Caballero. "We have considered and we do consider it to be our duty," the letter pointed out, "to come to the aid, within the limits of the possibilities at our disposal, to the Spanish government which is leading the struggle of the entire working people and of all Spanish democracy against the military fascist clique which is an instrument of international fascist forces." ¹⁰⁹

Since non-intervention in the affairs of Spain had been reduced to a mere farce because of the action of the Third Reich and fascist Italy, the Soviet government deemed it to be its duty to resume the sales of war equipment to the legitimate government of Spain. When the fascist forces launched their offensive on the 7th of November, 1936, to capture Madrid, the legitimate Spanish government already had some Soviet tanks and aircraft at its disposal.

The slogan of Spanish patriots "No pasaran!" rang out in many countries of the world. Under that slogan, from 20 to 25 thousand volunteers, who had arrived in Republican Spain from all countries, including the Soviet Union, were heroically fighting for democracy, against fascism.

The Spanish reactionary forces, when starting the rebellion, hoped for a quick and easy victory over the Spanish Republicans. However, their designs fell through. A mass of the people of Spain rose to fight the rebels. Their heroism proved to be superior to fascist weapons. Having braved the onslaught of the invading forces against the Spanish capital, they frustrated the fascist plan to make short shrift of the Republic. What happened instead was the first major armed battle in Europe of the forces of aggression and fascism against those of peace and progress which went

on for over two years.

The Civil War and foreign intervention in Spain substantially changed the alignment of forces in Europe. Since the attention of Britain, France and Italy, for whom the problems of the Mediterranean were of tremendous importance, had been riveted to the events in Spain, those in Central Europe receded into the background. The Nazi Reich took advantage of that to step up its action and start outright preparations for the seizure of Austria and Czechoslovakia. What made things easier for it was that France was departing from the course towards co-operation with the Soviet Union she had barely taken, and joined Britain in seeking an imperialist deal with Germany and Italy, that is in abetting their aggressive designs.

*The Berlin-Rome Axis.
Anti-Comintern Pact*

Close co-operation of Italian and German fascists in the invasion of Spain accelerated the cobbling together of their aggressor bloc. "We must take up an active role," Hitler said in a conversation with Italy's Foreign Minister Ciano. "We must go over to the attack." The Nazi Chancellor argued that there was no clash of interests between Germany and Italy: Germany must have a free hand in the East of Europe and in the Baltic region, while any change in the balance of forces in the Mediterranean must be in Italy's interest. He said the German government was successfully conducting negotiations on co-operation also with Japan and Poland. The tactical field on which Germany and Italy could execute their manoeuvre in respect of the Western powers, Hitler stressed, was that of anti-Bolshevism.¹¹⁰

A German-Italian agreement which started the so-called Berlin-Rome Axis was signed the day after that conversation, on October 25, 1936. The two aggressors agreed on measures they could take to help the Spanish rebels. The Nazis recognised Italy's annexation of Ethiopia, while the Italians promised not to interfere in relations between Germany and Austria.

The Nazi Reich attached tremendous importance also to strengthening its links with Japan since she could become

its major ally in the war both against the USSR and against the Western powers. German-Japanese talks had begun on Germany's initiative back in 1935. Japan, which harboured the idea of a far-reaching expansion into the Far Eastern and other areas of Asia was also interested in having allies. The Japanese military attaché in the USSR Kasahara, in his reports to the War Ministry, emphasised the need to "involve the Western neighbours and other states in the war against the USSR".¹¹¹ Hostility towards the USSR was equally great in Nazi Germany and in militarist Japan. On January 12, 1936, the Soviet Ambassador to Germany, Y. Z. Surits, reported, with many facts to bear him out, that Germany and Japan, "treaty or no treaty . . . will join forces in a conflict against the USSR. So far as we are concerned, Japan and Germany are bound together by the ties of blood, by a community of interests and by the you-scratch-my-back-and-I-scratch-yours principle".¹¹² The rulers of Germany and Japan, however, feared they could provoke the displeasure of the Western powers by concluding an outright military alliance. To conceal the true purpose of the German-Japanese collusion, the Nazis offered to call it "Anti-Comintern Pact". The Pact was signed on November 25, 1936.

Naturally, the name of the Pact misled nobody in the Soviet Union. It laid, in fact, the foundations of the military alliance of the aggressors in the coming war. A secret agreement was signed together with the Pact between Germany and Japan providing that in the event of a conflict of one of its signatories with the USSR, they "must immediately consider steps required for the defence of their common interests".¹¹³

The Gestapo chief Himmler, informing Hitler on January 31, 1937, about his negotiations with the Japanese military attaché in Berlin General Oshima, pointed out that the object of the measures being worked out by German and Japanese representatives was to dismember Russia, starting from the Caucasus and the Ukraine.¹¹⁴

A bilateral Italian-Japanese treaty was concluded also on December 2, 1936, to form a bloc of three aggressor powers. The "Axis" became "Triangle". The Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs of the USSR, B. S. Stomonyakov, pointed out in a letter to the Soviet Ambassador in Tokyo M. M. Slavutsky that Japan had further strengthened her

links with Germany and Italy and, according to quite reliable sources, the Japanese government considered these relations to have "virtually assumed the character of an alliance".¹¹⁵

That was how an alliance of three aggressors was set up to try and redraw the map of the world by means of war. That alliance posed a tremendous danger to the USSR. At the same time it was directed against many other nations, both large and small. Without venturing to attack the USSR for the time being, the aggressors used that alliance for concerting their action against those states which they could rather hope to overpower.

Pirates from the Apennines

Taking advantage of the policy of "non-intervention", pursued by Britain, France and the United States, the fascist powers were acting with growing impudence everywhere, Spain included. They decided to block up Republican Spain from the sea. Fascist submarines started piratically attacking ships bound for her ports. Merchant vessels of the USSR, Britain, France and Greece, Scandinavia, and some other countries were attacked by "unidentified" submarines. It was an open secret, however, that those "unidentified" submarines were Italian, that is, those coming from the Apennines. Enough documentary evidence has since appeared to confirm this. For example, on December 16, 1936, Mussolini disclosed, in a conversation with the German Ambassador U. Hassell, that seven Italian submarines were active in those operations.¹¹⁶

Soviet steamship *Timiryazev* was sunk in the Mediterranean on August 30, 1937, and the *Blagoyev* on September 1. The Soviet government lodged a strong protest with the government of Italy.

Increasingly brazen action of pirates in the major imperial lines of communication routes of Britain and France could not but anger their own ruling establishment. After an "unidentified" submarine torpedoed the British destroyer *Havoc*, on August 31, Britain, which once ruled the seas, found it impossible to tolerate such humiliation any longer. So when the French government, early in September, called for a conference on action to control piracy in the Mediterranean, Britain seconded that initiative.

An international conference met in Nyon on September 10-14, 1937, to work out a specific and effective agreement to control piracy in the Mediterranean. Speaking at the conference, Litvinov declared that the Soviet Union was interested in the questions it dealt with not only because the USSR had its shores washed by the waters mixing with those of the Mediterranean, which linked the Soviet ports with the outside world as well as between themselves, but also because "the Soviet Union as a major power, conscious of its rights and obligations, is interested in keeping up the international order and peace and in opposing all kinds of aggression and international violence".¹¹⁷

It was decided at the conference to destroy the submarines that would attempt to attack merchant shipping and appropriate measures were outlined. Their effect at once put an end almost totally to fascist piracy in the Mediterranean.

The Nyon Conference was of great importance also in that it showed the possibility and effect of collective action against aggression. It offered conclusive evidence to show that, given joint determined action by the USSR, Britain and France, the aggressors would have to retreat. Its decisions were a great achievement largely due to Soviet diplomacy.

The *Washington Star*, in an article "Victory of Red Diplomacy", said on September 12, 1937, that one had to recognise that the result of anti-pirate conference in Nyon looked too much like a victory for Soviet diplomacy. That Conference had been organised by Britain and France, but it was thanks to Russia alone that the Conference was compelled to take prompt and concrete decisions.

That positive experience of collective action against the aggressor was not, unfortunately, taken into account by the ruling circles of Britain and France subsequently in what was a far more complex setting.

Spanish Fascists in Madrid

Meanwhile, the fascist powers continued to render tremendous assistance to Franco. Having built up their forces, the invaders and the rebels launched an offensive early in 1938. On April 15, they succeeded in breaking through

to the Mediterranean, north of Valencia, cutting Spanish territory in two. That seriously complicated the situation of the Spanish Republic.

The Republic was stabbed in the back by British Premier Neville Chamberlain. On a visit to Rome, he signed a treaty of friendship and co-operation with Mussolini on April 16, 1938. Under that treaty, the British government acknowledged Franco's right of a belligerent part after some of the foreign combatants had been withdrawn from Spain. At the same time, Britain recognised Italy's annexation of Ethiopia.

The policy of the French government differed but little from that of Britain. The government of Daladier which came into office in April 1938 turned right abruptly. The Soviet Ambassador in Paris, Surits, pointed out on June 26, 1938, that the French Minister for Foreign Affairs, Georges Bonnet, "has taken a definite line towards strangling Barcelona and establishing 'normal' relations with Franco".¹¹⁸

The Spanish people, with support from the progressive forces of the whole world, continued their heroic resistance to the fascist invasion. However, the position of the Republic was getting increasingly critical because of the collusion of the reactionary governing quarters of Western powers with German and Italian fascists.

On February 27, 1939, Britain and France recognised the government of Franco and broke off diplomatic relations with the Spanish Republic. Under those circumstances, the Soviet government found it impossible to continue to participate in the deliberations of the Non-Intervention Committee. On March 1, 1939, it decided to recall its representative from the committee.

Shortly afterwards the fascist forces captured Madrid and established their domination of the whole country by the end of March. The victory of the Italian and German invaders and rebels over the Spanish Republic essentially altered the situation in Europe. The hopes of the British ruling circles that they could keep Spain under their control by economic means proved to be an illusion. On March 27, 1939, Franco joined the Anti-Comintern Pact. Having thus blown up France's rear, Germany and Italy created favourable opportunities for stepping up their acts of aggression in Central and Eastern Europe.

THE WAR IN THE FAR EAST

Outbreak of the Japan-China War

On July 7, 1937, Japanese troops provoked an incident with Chinese forces in the area not far from Peking. That was the start of the Japanese invasion of North and then Central China.

The Japanese government had worked out a plan to establish Japanese domination of Eastern Asia—"Basic Principles of National Policy". First of all, the Japanese militarists intended to capture North China and then the rest of China. Japan proposed to swell her armed forces stationed in Korea and Manchuria so as, subsequently attacking the USSR, "strike a decisive blow at the Russians at the very outbreak of the war". They planned, besides, to penetrate the South Seas area. It was found necessary to speed up and bring off the preparation of Japan's Armed Forces for war in order to achieve all those designs.¹¹⁹

The Japanese ruling quarters believed that the intervention by Germany and Italy in Spain created a favourable context for their aggressive plans to be carried out. The U.S. Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles pointed out in that connection that the "bandit nations drew together, their respective policies became more and more clearly synchronised".¹²⁰

Once through with her preparations, Japan set about carrying out her far-reaching plans of aggrandizement in July 1937. That was how the Japan-China war started.

It was one of the conflagrations later to become part of the Second World War.

The Soviet government clearly realised the full gravity of the situation as it shaped up both in Europe and in the Far East. *Izvestia* unequivocally put the question: "Peace or War?" in its leading article "Against War, Against Fascism". This question, the paper pointed out, sounds today as ominous as never before for it is agitating the minds of millions of people anxious about their future.¹²¹

Japan's aggressive action was exacerbating the international situation and seriously affected the interests of the monopolies of the United States, Britain and France. The

Anglo-Franco-American alignment was potentially far stronger than Japan. Joint action by these three powers could have deterred the aggressors. All the more so since Japan's war plans could have been nipped in the bud, should the U.S., Britain and France have established co-operation with the Soviet Union. The governments of the three powers, however, wanted no trucks with the USSR, although they were thereby undermining their own positions.

The reactionary quarters of the Western powers still hoped that the war between Japan and the USSR would begin sooner or later. And in that case, they presumed, Japan would have to stop her expansion into the areas where she would be threatening the interests of the United States, Britain and France. Moreover, the Western powers expected that such a war would certainly weaken both the USSR and Japan which would give the United States, Britain and France an opportunity not only to maintain their positions in the Far East, but even reinforce them.

British imperialists kept on conniving at aggression in the Far East as well as in Europe. They clearly sought a compromise arrangement with Japan at China's expense. However, they were not averse to their interests being defended by others. It was a war between Japan and the USSR that, as stated earlier on, suited Britain most of all.

The United States thought its interest to be far more hurt by Japan's actions in China than by the Italian aggression in Ethiopia, the German and Italian intervention in Spain and other developments in Europe. Japan was the United States' major imperialist rival. Nevertheless, the U.S. also took up a rather restrained position over the Japanese invasion of China. The U.S. ruling circles feared, in particular, that should it have joined the war against Japan, Britain and France would shift its brunt to the United States. This led to the U.S. together with Britain and France conniving at Japanese aggression. Measures, taken by the U.S., Britain and France in connection with the Japanese aggression boiled down to an attempt at somehow protecting their major interests in China by means of an imperialist collusion with Japan. The ruling quarters of those countries did not so much as contemplate any defence of China's interests or any assistance to it in resisting the Japanese invasion. On the contrary, the imperialist powers

feared that the Chinese, should they have succeeded in beating back the Japanese imperialist incursion, could have also expelled other colonialists from their country.

The Soviet Union at China's Side

The Soviet Union was alone ready to lend a helping hand to China in the struggle against the Japanese aggressors. The Soviet government had no particular contractual obligations to China. Nevertheless, true to its policy of supporting the victims of imperialist aggression, it was ready and willing to come to the aid of the Chinese people in their struggle against foreign intervention.

The Soviet government took advantage of Anthony Eden's visit to Moscow in 1935 in order to talk the issue of a Pacific Pact over with him. What the Soviet Union offered to conclude was no longer a non-aggression pact but one of mutual assistance. The People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs said on the eve of Eden's visit: "We are prepared to co-operate with Britain as well as with other nations in securing peace in the Far East." "In concrete terms we contemplate a regional Pacific Pact of Mutual Assistance involving the USSR, China, Japan, Great Britain, the United States, France, Holland..." The Pact meant essentially that "Japan's further aggression would be resisted by the forces of all the other parties to the Pact."¹²²

On March 28, 1935, the Soviet People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs emphasised in a conversation with Anthony Eden that for a lasting peace to be ensured in the Pacific "there must be collective efforts by all the interested nations". However, Eden did not go along with that proposal. He questioned the United States' readiness for active co-operation in safeguarding peace and security in the Far East.¹²³

The British government was not inclined to share in setting up a collective security system in the Far East, but it sought to put the blame for abetting the Japanese aggression on the United States.

The U.S. government still preferred a different way of ensuring its interest in the Far East. That was stated quite openly by Walton R. Moore, U.S. Deputy Under Secretary of State, in a conversation with the Soviet Charge d'Affai-

res in the United States A. F. Neuman. It will take several years, he said, for the United States to gain superiority over Japan. "It hoped," Neuman commented, "that the USSR would make things easier for it by starting a war against Japan."¹²⁴

The Chinese Head of Government Kung Hsiang-hsi (President of the Executive Yuan) asked the Soviet Ambassador D. V. Bogomolov in October 1935 whether China could count on getting any war equipment from the USSR in case it needed to put up armed resistance against Japan. On November 20, 1935, the Soviet Ambassador informed Kung about the Soviet consent to supply China with war equipment.¹²⁵ The Chiang Kai-shek government, however, hoping to avoid an outright armed conflict with Japan through concessions, had itself begun stalling negotiations on the enforcement of that accord.

In the meantime, the Japanese militarists were increasingly aggressive. Japan's expansionist plans were still directed against the USSR as well. The German Ambassador to Japan, von Dirksen, reported to Berlin on December 28, 1935, that Japan was hostile towards the USSR and "determined" to settle her differences with the Soviet Union "by force of arms as soon as she feels militarily strong enough".¹²⁶

The Japanese octopus began to stretch out its tentacles towards the Mongolian People's Republic as well, intent on capturing it as a stepping-stone in preparation for war against the USSR. On March 28, 1936, the Kwangtung Army Chief of Staff, General Itagaki, in a conversation with Foreign Minister Arita, explained what the seizure of the MPR could mean to Japan: "Should Outer Mongolia be annexed to Japan and Manchuria, the security of the Soviet Far East would be struck hard... Therefore, the Army is planning to extend the influence of Japan and Manchuria to Outer Mongolia with all the means at its disposal".¹²⁷ In view of the threat of Japanese aggression, the Soviet government had concluded a gentleman's agreement with it back on November 27, 1934—at the request of the MPR government—providing for "reciprocal support by all measures in preventing or forestalling the threat of an armed attack and also in lending one another assistance and support in the event of any third party attacking the USSR or the MPR".¹²⁸

Since the danger from Japan continued to grow (it came to full-scale fighting across the MPR border), the USSR and the MPR signed a protocol on mutual assistance on March 12, 1936. Referring to the import of that protocol, the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs pointed out in a letter to the Soviet Ambassador in Japan that it "is a new link in the chain of consistent actions whereby we are curbing the aggression against the MPR. Now Japan is, of course, in no doubt that her conquest of Mongolia would lead to a war against the Soviet Union."¹²⁹ That protocol, just as the gentleman's agreement, was of tremendous importance for safeguarding the security of the MPR and strengthening peace in the Far East.

On March 4, 1937, Litvinov took the question of a Pacific Pact of Mutual Assistance up with the Chinese Ambassador to the USSR Jiang Ting-fu. "It is my conviction," he said, "that such a pact alone can definitely stop Japan's aggression and ensure peace in the Far East." He went on to point out that this had to be brought home to the other powers, particularly Great Britain and the United States, and that both Chinese and Soviet diplomacy had to work towards that end.¹³⁰

The Soviet Ambassador to China (Nanking), D. V. Bogomolov received detailed directives in mid-March for his negotiations with the Chinese government. The directives proposed concluding a treaty of friendship with the Nanking government providing for "either party to refrain from taking any step or concluding any agreement which could benefit a third state threatening to attack the other contracting party". It also provided for both parties to take steps "with a view to protecting their common interests". The Soviet government expressed its readiness to conclude a military and technical agreement with the Nanking government providing for the sale of aircraft, tanks, and other military and technical equipment to be paid for out of a 50 million dollar credit granted to this end, as well as for Chinese airmen and tankmen to be trained in the USSR.

The Soviet Union called for the treaty of friendship to incorporate a pledge by both parties to do their utmost towards the early conclusion of the Pacific Pact of Mutual Assistance. On April 1, Bogomolov passed these proposals to Kung Hsiang-hsi.¹³¹

However, the Chinese government was still wavering. On

June 16, 1937, the Soviet Ambassador in China reported to the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs that the Chinese government looked askance at the idea of a Pacific Pact because it was afraid of arousing Japan's displeasure and "finally closing the door to a bilateral agreement with Japan which Chiang Kai-shek was still hoping for". The Chinese were giving no reply to the proposal for concluding a treaty of non-aggression and helping China with supplies of war equipment.¹³²

On May 14, Prime Minister Joseph Lyons of Australia also came forward with a proposal to conclude the Pacific Pact, which, however, was a pact of non-aggression, rather than one of mutual assistance. The Soviet government decided, therefore, to try once more to get the Pact concluded.

In the latter half of May, Litvinov while in Geneva for a session of the Council of the League of Nations, was negotiating the Pacific Pact with the British Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, and the President of the Executive Yuan of China, Kung Hsiang-hsi.¹³³ The Soviet Ambassador in London I. M. Maisky was instructed to talk the matter over with Lyons. The Ambassador was asked to inform the Australian Prime Minister about the Soviet Union's positive response to his proposal, but along with suggesting a pact of mutual assistance.¹³⁴

On June 15, Maisky had an appropriate conversation with Lyons. The latter reacted favourably to the idea of concluding a pact of mutual assistance, but suggested that neither Britain nor the United States were prepared to conclude such an agreement.¹³⁵

The Soviet Ambassador in Washington Troyanovsky was asked to find out where the United States stood on the matter. "True," the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs wrote to him, "we meant a Pacific Pact of Mutual Assistance, while Lyons is reducing the whole thing to a pledge of non-aggression."¹³⁶

Roosevelt, however, showed no desire to join the pact. He told Troyanovsky on June 28 that the U.S. could not enter into any alliances or any similar agreements. As to Lyons' proposal for concluding a Pacific Pact of Non-Aggression, Roosevelt did not second it either on the plea that there was no point in concluding such a pact with no Japan in it.¹³⁷

When the Japanese invasion of China began on July 7,

1937, the Soviet press roundly condemned that action of the Japanese aggressors. "This is a new and important stage in the imperialist struggle in Eastern Asia and in the Pacific", the *Izvestia* wrote, "and a new and essential stage in the aggression of Japanese imperialism seeking to subjugate the Chinese people."¹³⁸

It was on July 19, 1937, that the Chinese government finally ventured to accept Soviet aid. It asked the USSR through the Soviet Ambassador to provide war equipment and grant appropriate credits.¹³⁹ The Soviet government responded to China's request for aid. On July 29, the Soviet Ambassador to China was instructed to inform the Chinese government about the Soviet consent to meet its request.¹⁴⁰

While expressing its readiness to supply China with war equipment, the Soviet government found it necessary for the USSR and China to conclude, tentatively, a treaty of friendship and non-aggression because there had to be a guarantee that "our weapons will not be used against us". The Soviet Ambassador raised the matter several times with representatives of the Chinese government.¹⁴¹

Meanwhile, China was pressing hard for the conclusion of a Soviet-Chinese treaty of mutual assistance. The matter was raised with the Soviet Ambassador on July 16 by the President of the Legislative Yuan of China, Sun Fo. Chen Li-fu, who was negotiating with the Soviet Ambassador on instructions from Chiang Kai-shek, insisted on such a treaty being signed when he conferred with him three days later.¹⁴² Explaining the sum and substance of those Chinese proposals, the Soviet Ambassador wrote in his dispatch to Moscow: "Banking on a Japanese-Soviet War remains Chiang Kai-shek's *idéc fixe*."¹⁴³

As China was already in a virtual state of war with Japan, the Soviet government, naturally, did not find it possible to conclude a bilateral treaty of mutual assistance with her.¹⁴⁴ Maxim Litvinov wrote to the Soviet Ambassador that "the idea behind the Chinese insistence on this issue at the present moment is, in point of fact, that we should get involved in a war with Japan right now".¹⁴⁵

On August 21, 1937, the USSR and China signed a treaty of non-aggression which was, under the circumstances, one of supreme importance for strengthening China's international position. In an editorial on the treaty, *Pravda* emphasised that the treaty was a fresh expression of the

friendship which the peoples of the USSR had for the Chinese people in battle for their freedom and independence. The Soviet-Chinese treaty, the article pointed out, practically confirmed and anchored the principle of the indivisibility of peace and the need to defend peace both in the West and in the East. "The Soviet-Chinese Treaty shows to all nations the way to oppose the war threat... It is a new instrument of peace."¹⁴⁶

The conclusion of the Soviet-Chinese Treaty of Non-Aggression, the Soviet Ambassador to Japan Slavutsky pointed out, produced a "tremendous impression" in Japan.¹⁴⁷ Tokyo qualified the treaty as a diplomatic setback for Japan.

Agreement on the actual deliveries of war equipment to China on account of the Soviet-granted long-term credit was reached as early as September 14. The delivery of the first hatch of aircraft was to be within the shortest possible time-limits at the request of the Chinese delegation. The Soviet side undertook to ship the first 225 aircraft, including 62 medium bombers and 155 lighter planes to China by October 25, 1937.¹⁴⁸ The Chinese Ambassador to the USSR Jian Ting-fu declared in a conversation with Deputy People's Commissar Stomonyakov that the Chinese were most pleased with the spirit and outcome of the negotiations which had given China even more than they had expected.¹⁴⁹

By the middle of 1938, the Soviet Union had delivered to China 297 aircraft, 82 tanks, 425 guns and howitzers, 1,825 machine-guns, 400 motor vehicles, 360 thousand shells, 10 million cartridges and other items of war equipment.¹⁵⁰ Soviet aid made it possible for China to hold out, avoid being defeated and having to surrender, and to keep up resistance to the Japanese aggressors.

Because of Soviet aid to China, however, the danger of Japan attacking the USSR had increased. The French Foreign Minister, Delbos, told the U.S. Ambassador in Paris, Bullitt, on August 26, 1937, that he had received a message from the French Ambassador in Japan saying that "Japan is likely to declare war on the Soviet Union". The British Ambassador to Japan Craigie also pointed out that the Japanese "would have to square their accounts with the USSR". The U.S. Assistant Military Attaché in Japan Wecklerling wrote to Washington that "the Japanese Army regards Soviet Russia as its principal enemy", and that there

was a feeling of certainty that "nothing can prevent another Russo-Japanese war."¹⁵¹ The Soviet Ambassador to Japan, Slavutsky, states that the Japanese militarists were trying with might and main to make the Japanese people accept the "inevitability of an imminent war with the Soviet Union".¹⁵²

What complicated the Soviet Union's international position even more was that in the event of war in the Far East, it would have to reckon also with serious complications across its Western border. The Japanese Ambassador in Berlin told the French Ambassador A. François-Poncet that the German and Italian governments had promised to Japan "active military aid in the event of the USSR being involved in a Far Eastern conflict on China's side".¹⁵³

The position of Poland also aroused grave apprehension. The Japanese military attaché in Poland General Sawada asking the Polish government on August 24, 1937, to support the Japanese during the discussion of the Japan-China conflict in the League of Nations, stressed that China was co-operating with the USSR while Japan and Poland had "common interests" in respect to the Soviet Union. The Polish government readily responded to that request in the belief that "Japan is Poland's natural ally".¹⁵⁴

Japan did not venture, however, into a war against the USSR. Along with the rapid economic growth of the Soviet Union, its defence capability was mounting. Besides, the Soviet government had been constantly giving most careful attention to strengthening the defences of its Far Eastern border. This could not but produce a sobering effect on the Japanese aggressors.

Japanese Aggression and the League of Nations

In mid-September 1937, the Chinese government officially asked the Council of the League of Nations for sanctions against Japan under the terms of the Covenant. The Soviet government informed China that it would support its request.¹⁵⁵

The governments of Britain and France found it undesirable for the Japanese aggression to be considered in the

League of Nations, first of all, because they did not propose to take any measures against Japan. Besides, if there was no way at all of avoiding a discussion of this issue, London and Paris wanted it to involve also the United States of America. Therefore, Britain and France preferred to see the Japan-China conflict considered in any agency representing the United States as well, rather than in the League of Nations.

Speaking before the Assembly of the League of Nations on December 21, the Soviet People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs Litvinov emphasised that aggression was manifesting itself in new and more violent forms. However, the League of Nations stayed out of those events, without reacting to them. The People's Commissar called on all nations to pool efforts in working for peace and opposing aggression. He pointed out that the "League's resolute policy in dealing with one case of aggression would spare us all other cases. And then, only then, would all nations come to see that aggression does not pay and that aggression is not worth making."¹⁵⁶

The Soviet Union has gone down in the history of the League of Nations as the most consistent champion of the victims of the German, Italian and Japanese aggression, and as the protagonist of those forces in it which demanded the full maintenance of the Covenant.¹⁵⁷

In advance of the League of Nations' discussion of Japanese aggression, scheduled for September 27, the People's Commissar had received the following directive: "It is desirable for us both to see Japan voted aggressor and most effective sanctions applied against her. However, in case of an obviously passive reaction of other states ... we do not consider it politically expedient for the Soviet delegation to be the pace-setter risking to strain still more the Soviet Union's relations with Japan and to give more food for charging us with incitement. Should, however, the other members of the League of Nations show a serious intention to raise the question of Japan's responsibility and of declaring her to be an aggressor, you ought to be active in supporting this effort. Since it takes a unanimous vote for her to be found guilty of aggression, it is doubtful that such a vote could be obtained. If, after all, in spite of all expectations, such a decision were taken and the question of sanctions automatically arose, nothing would prevent you from

declaring ... for the application of most effective sanctions against Japan."¹⁵⁸

The representatives of Britain and France in the League of Nations did not conceal that the two powers did not intend to take any steps against the Japanese aggressor.¹⁵⁹ They referred to the fact that they did not know the position of the United States.

Under instructions from Moscow, the Soviet Chargé d'Affaires in the United States, Oumansky, approached Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles asking him to explain the position of the United States. The latter replied that the U.S. government was not in a position to draw any distinction between the aggressor and the victim of aggression and "to sympathise with the victim on any ground whatsoever".¹⁶⁰ After hearing Welles make his point, Oumansky described the U.S. policy as "very discouraging".¹⁶¹

Under those circumstances, the League of Nations' decisions on Japanese aggression adopted on October 6 turned out to be extremely inconclusive. The League limited itself to stating that Japan had broken its commitments under the existing treaties and to declaring "moral support" for China. It recommended to the Powers concerned to call a special conference on the matter.¹⁶²

The Brussels Conference

Preparations began, under a decision of the League of Nations, for a conference of nations with a stake in the Far Eastern situation. Brussels had been chosen as the venue for it.

The question of attendance arose right away. It was the United States, Britain and other sponsors of the conference that were particularly anxious to get the Japanese aggressors invited. Owing to this, Litvinov wrote to the Soviet Ambassador in the United States Troyanovsky that by urging the Japanese to attend the conference, they were assured in every way that "it will consider a reconciliation rather than any measures against Japan whatsoever."¹⁶³

The Government of Japan declined, however, to attend the conference.

In the opinion of the U.S. government, the conference was to have tried to reconcile Japan and China. Roosevelt told the leader of the American delegation at the conference

Norman Davis that the word "sanctions is to be rigorously avoided".¹⁶³

The British government also proceeded from the assumption that "the conference was not meeting in order to consider whether sanctions should be imposed against Japan," but for "restoration of peace by agreement".¹⁶⁵

Only the USSR was still urging effective steps against the Japanese aggressors and for the defence of China. The Soviet delegation in Brussels worked under instructions to press for a declaration or a resolution of the conference to recommend to all participants "to render China all possible and maximum assistance both individually and collectively".¹⁶⁶ Litvinov wrote on October 20, 1937 that the USSR considered it desirable for effective sanctions to be applied against the Japanese aggressor.¹⁶⁷ In a conversation with the U.S. Ambassador to the USSR on October 29, the People's Commissar again stated that the Soviet Union was seriously interested in ending the aggression and establishing peace and collective security. The USSR was prepared to take up a resolute stand in co-operation with the United States, France and Britain, he declared.¹⁶⁸

It was the U.S. delegation that called the tune at the Brussels Conference, which opened on November 3, 1937, with its programme of "appeasement" of the Japanese aggressors. Norman Davis did not find it right and proper to point out in his speech who was the aggressor and who its victim. Japan and China, he said, "have come into conflict and have resorted to hostilities". And he proposed that the conflict should be solved on a basis that is "fair to each and acceptable to both".¹⁶⁹ That could mean only one thing: the United States was prepared to see Japan's aggressive ambitions gratified at China's expense, and the Chinese people humbly putting up with it. The British and the French followed in his footsteps. Anthony Eden and Yvon Delbos declared that they subscribed to all Norman Davis had said.

It was the Soviet delegation alone that took up a position of principle at the conference. The leader of the Soviet delegation in Brussels, Maxim Litvinov, in his speech on November 3 expressed his disagreement with the policy of the United States, Britain and France which advocated a peace "acceptable to both". He pointed out that there was nothing easier than to say to the aggressor: "Take your

plunder, take what you have seized by force, and peace be with you," and to say to the victim of aggression: "Love your aggressor, resist not evil". But that can call forth nothing but more acts of aggression, he emphasised. In such a case, the conference could turn out to be a "tool of the aggressor", instead of acting against aggression. Having reiterated the oft-stated position of the USSR regarding action to oppose aggression, Litvinov stressed the necessity of rallying the nations working to keep the peace.¹⁷⁰

The assessment of the Soviet delegation's position given by Norman Davis is noteworthy. "Litvinov is arguing to me", he wrote to Washington, "in favour of close co-operation and understanding between Britain, the United States and Russia on the ground that if Japan were confronted with such a combination, she would agree to stop hostilities."¹⁷¹

On November 6, the conference drew up the text of another appeal to Japan inviting her to join it. Then it was adjourned pending her reply.

In the meantime, Japan went on intensifying and expanding her military operations in China. On November 12, Japanese troops captured Shanghai, thereby appreciably strengthening their foothold in Central China. On the same day, the Japanese government once more rejected the appeal from the Brussels Conference.

The Brussels Conference resumed on November 13. The Chinese representative raised the question of economic sanctions against Japan and assistance to China. However, the representatives of the United States, Britain and France turned a deaf ear to it. Norman Davis intimated that he was still hoping to get Japan to co-operate.

The Soviet delegation again came out in support of the Chinese proposal. Potemkin, who now led the Soviet delegation, declared that to end the aggression there would have to be "co-operative and effective efforts by the powers interested in keeping the peace in the Far East. Every concrete initiative in this sense would be supported by the Soviet Union."¹⁷² Davis reported to Washington that Potemkin "was very insistent in urging us to recommend concrete measures against Japan" because there was no other way to stop the conflict. Potemkin reiterated that the USSR "would join in anything the British and ourselves might be prepared to do",¹⁷³

On November 24 the conference adopted a declaration to say that it was suspending its sittings temporarily in order to afford the participating governments the time "to further explore all peaceful methods by which a settlement of the dispute may be attained."¹⁷⁴ That was the last meeting of the conference.

The breakdown of the Brussels Conference was a direct sequel to the policy of abetting the Japanese aggression which was pursued by the United States, Britain and France. While the major responsibility for "non-intervention" in the German-Italian invasion of Spain lay with the British and French "appeasers", the main blame for the policy of abetting the Japanese aggression rested with the United States.

The ruling circles of the United States, Britain and France considered that the best way out of the situation thus created was through an imperialist collusion with Japan for the "peaceful" plunder of China by all of them so as to have the Japanese aggression turn against the Soviet Union. Since the Japanese imperialists continued their acts of aggression in China, in violation of the interests of the United States, Britain and France, and showed no intention of attacking the USSR for the time being, the governing quarters of the Western powers tried to push the USSR into some kind of action against Japan. That came to light in the closing days of the Brussels Conference.

Potemkin wrote from Brussels, reporting his conversation with the Chairman of the conference, Paul Spaak, Belgium's Foreign Minister, that the latter had provocatively declared that "the best means to make Japan more tractable was by sending a few hundred Soviet aircraft to give Tokyo a scare". Potemkin replied that there must have been some in Brussels who evidently were too fond of "having others pull the chestnuts out of the fire for them".¹⁷⁵

The Soviet government gave a sober assessment of the situation. It was prepared to undertake most effective measures in assisting China in its struggle against the Japanese aggressors, but it wanted to do so together with the United States, Britain and France. The Soviet Union could not fail to take into account under the circumstances the fact, in particular, that in the event of war with Japan, it could have run the risk of being attacked by Germany and even, perhaps, by some other of its Western neighbours who had

long been co-operating with Japan on an anti-Soviet ground.

After the conference, Litvinov, writing to the Soviet Ambassador in the United States, Troyanovsky, pointed out that the USSR had, right from the start, been sceptical of the possible outcome of the Brussels Conference, and, therefore, had held a "rather restrained position" at it, but the conference ended "even more disgracefully than one could have expected it to".¹⁷⁶

The utter futility of the Brussels Conference because of the position of the Western powers had the effect of intensifying the Japanese aggression in China. On November 27, that is, two days after the conference was over, Japanese troops launched an offensive against Nanking, which was the home of the Chinese government at the time. The city fell to them on December 13.

Japanese Aggressors Defeated at Lake Khasan

The events which occurred in the area of Lake Khasan, the Soviet Far East, in July and August 1938, provided clear evidence of the Soviet Union's determination and readiness to give a resolute rebuff to aggression.

While waging their war against China, the Japanese imperialists began to show themselves aggressive throughout the Far East, including the areas close to the Soviet frontiers. The Soviet government had to make repeated representations to the Japanese authorities. The Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs Stomonyakov drew the attention of the Japanese Ambassador in Moscow, Shigemitsu, to the fact, that there was a systematic campaign of slander and propaganda of war against the Soviet Union in Japan, often with the involvement of official institutions and personalities. The Japanese military leaders did not stop short of direct calls for a war against the USSR.¹⁷⁷

Japanese troops systematically violated the Soviet border. About a dozen Japanese combat aircraft invaded Soviet airspace on April 11, for example. On June 8, the Japanese attempted to land a 29-man armed band on the Soviet bank of the Amur River. The Japanese authorities had more than once detained Soviet ships without any excuse

whatsoever. On February 19, they seized the Soviet freighter *Kuznetskstroï* in a Japanese port, with a crew of 35 and 37 passengers. The Soviet press had every reason to qualify that as "yet another deliberate Japanese provocation".¹⁷⁸

At the same time, the Japanese ruling circles, drilling the nation for a war of aggression against the USSR, were stoking up anti-Soviet feelings in Japan. "Japan's position with regard to the USSR," the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs said, "has become still more aggressive and arrogant." The Japanese militarists "are systematically striving to exacerbate relations, without missing a single occasion or opportunity for it. They have Japanese diplomacy, with Hirota and Shigemitsu in the lead, at their service."¹⁷⁹

The Japanese acts of provocation had attained a particular degree of intensity by the middle of the year. The Japanese press (as the *Asahi*, *Yomiuri* and other newspapers) was openly calling for a war against the Soviet Union and the capture of the Soviet Far East. The Japanese troops stationed in Korea deliberately started acts of provocation against the Soviet frontier guards at Lake Khasan.¹⁸⁰

In mid-July, the Japanese Chargé d'Affaires in Moscow turned to the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs with an unjustified claim that Soviet troops were illegally holding the western shore of Lake Khasan. The Japanese diplomat was offered to look through the 1869 Hunchung Agreement with a map appended to it which left no room for doubt that the western shore of the lake was part of Soviet territory.¹⁸¹

Calling on the Soviet People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs on July 20, Japanese Ambassador Shigemitsu once more demanded the withdrawal of Soviet troops from the area concerned. "Otherwise," the Ambassador threatened, "Japan would have to conclude that she has to resort to force." Litvinov reminded the Ambassador that the Japanese Chargé d'Affaires had been shown the official documents which quite clearly indicated the borderline passing through the mountains west of Lake Khasan. Soviet frontier guards in that area have no other object, the People's Commissar said, than to defend the Soviet frontier. "There is complete peace on the border, and it can only be broken by the Japanese-Manchurian side which, in that case, will be held responsible for the consequences." "As to the resort

to force," the People's Commissar emphasised, "if Mr. Ambassador considers such a threat and intimidation to be a good diplomatic expedient which may have an effect on certain states, in fact, he must know that such an expedient will not work in Moscow."¹⁸²

On July 29, 1938, Japanese troops launched military operations against the Soviet frontier guards on the Western shore of Lake Khasan. With a wealth of facts at its disposal, the International Military Tribunal for the Far East found in its indictment of the major Japanese war criminals that the Japanese attack at Lake Khasan had been deliberately planned by the Japanese. The Tribunal stated that "the operations of Japanese troops were of a demonstrably aggressive character."¹⁸³

Early in August, the Soviet forces launched resolute counter-action against the Japanese aggressors and cleared them out from Soviet territory on August 9. Heavily trounced, the Japanese had to retreat. A cease-fire agreement was achieved on August 10.

The defeat of the Japanese invaders in the area at Lake Khasan was a telling blow to the aggressive designs of imperialist Japan, those against the USSR, in particular. The Soviet head of government V. M. Molotov, summing up the events at Lake Khasan in his report to a meeting of the Moscow City Soviet on November 6, 1938, stated: "Can there be any doubt that the Japanese attack on our maritime provinces was a test of strength for launching a war in the Far East? Should the Soviet Union have failed to demonstrate the firmness of its foreign policy in real action and its immutable commitment to the defence of its frontiers by the force of the Red Army, that could well have served as an occasion for staging further acts of aggression. Our adamant position during those events brought those high-handed adventure-seekers both in Tokyo and Berlin back to their senses and compelled them to heat a retreat. Beyond dispute, the Soviet Union has thereby rendered the greatest possible service to the cause of peace."¹⁸⁴

The defeat of the Japanese troops at Lake Khasan was, in particular, a case of minor assistance to the Chinese people who went on fighting against the Japanese aggressors. Having demonstrated that the Japanese invaders were by no means omnipotent, those events went far towards reinforcing Chinese people's will to resist the aggressors.

China Aided by the USSR Alone

Getting war equipment abroad was still much of a headache to China. In January 1938, the Chinese government sent an emergency mission to the USSR, Britain and France, led by the Chairman of the Legislative Yuan, Sun Fo, to ask the governments of these countries for aid to China in her struggle against aggression. On his arrival in Moscow, Sun Fo told the Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Stomonyakov, that "in waging their war against the invaders, that is, for their liberation, the Chinese people are drawing their strength from the sympathies and support of the USSR".¹⁸⁵

From Moscow Sun Fo proceeded to London and Paris only to return several months later empty-handed. In a conversation with Deputy People's Commissar Potemkin on May 19, 1938, he admitted that the results of his tour were discouraging and that Britain and France avoided giving any aid to China. "The USSR remains the only country to be giving real aid to China,"¹⁸⁶ Sun Fo declared.

Britain's position in relation to China could be clearly seen from the memorandum submitted by the Foreign Office to the British government's Foreign Policy Committee on May 31. China, the memorandum said, "is fighting our own battle in the Far East, for, if Japan wins, our interests there are certainly doomed to extinction. The Japanese Army and other high authorities have left us in no doubt about that. Our immense vested interests in North China and Shanghai will be the first to go and the Japanese Army and Navy set no limits to their appetites on the Continent and in the South Seas. If China can only fight Japan to a stalemate, we and the Americans will then be able to intervene with effective results and safeguard our position for another generation."¹⁸⁷

On the following day, the Chancellor of the Exchequer John Simon flatly declared in the Foreign Policy Committee which was considering the matter, that there could be no question of a British government loan to China. He also expressed some very serious apprehension that assistance to China, even if insignificant, could entail most negative consequences for Anglo-Japanese relations.¹⁸⁸

China was still getting aid from the Soviet Union alone. Another agreement was signed between the USSR and Chi-

na in Moscow on July 1, 1938, under which the Soviet Union supplied China with 300 aircraft, 300 guns, 1,500 automatic rifles and 500 machine-guns, 300 lorries and other war equipment.¹⁸⁹

In a letter to the Soviet government, the President of the Executive Yuan of China Kung Hsiang-hsi expressed "most profound gratitude" for "effective sympathy and genuine friendship". Kung Hsiang-hsi pointed out that as a result of the "splendid and valuable assistance" in the shape of combat aircraft and other war equipment, China got an opportunity of "wearing out the enemy's aggressive forces and keeping up a sustained struggle".¹⁹⁰ The British historian Keith Middlemas pointed out that the USSR, supplying China with munitions once more "appeared as champion of the free world against aggression".¹⁹¹

Experienced Soviet military advisers (V. I. Chuikov, P. S. Rybalko, P. F. Batitsky, A. I. Cherepanov, to name just a few) arrived in China to share in making plans for the conduct of war against the Japanese invaders and in training Chinese officers and men. Over 90,000 people had their training under the guidance of Soviet instructors in various educational establishments and units of the Chinese Army. Soviet airmen had volunteered to join the battle against the aggressors in China.¹⁹²

In the summer of 1938, particularly in the face of the determined position taken up by the Soviet Union during the armed conflict at Lake Khasan, the Chinese government was once more pressing hard for a Sino-Soviet alliance to be concluded and for the USSR to enter the war against Japan.¹⁹³ However, the Soviet government exercised the necessary caution. While providing China with an increasing amount of war equipment, the Soviet Union did not find it possible to go to war against Japan. The Soviet Ambassador to China, I. G. Luganets-Orelsky emphasised in a conversation with Sun Fo that the Soviet Union, by its military, diplomatic and economic moves, had already prepared extensive ground for the development of Soviet-Chinese relations whereas to have concluded the pact as proposed by China could have had some materially negative consequences.¹⁹⁴

On September 8, 1938, the Soviet Ambassador had received the following instructions as to the answer to give to the Chinese government:

"1. At present the USSR does not consider it expedient to go to war against Japan in isolation from Britain or the United States. . .

2. The USSR will go to war against Japan only under the following three conditions: a) if Japan attacks the USSR; b) if Britain or the United States join the war against Japan; c) if the League of Nations obliges the Pacific Powers to confront Japan.

3. The USSR is prepared, under all circumstances to help China by supplying her with defence facilities under the treaties concluded between China and the USSR." ¹⁹⁵

On the same day, Luganets-Orelsky passed this reply to Sun Fo.

The defeat of the Japanese aggressors at Lake Khasan and the Soviet Union's effective assistance to China clearly demonstrated the potentialities of the USSR as well as its determination to take the necessary steps towards checking the aggressors.

Chapter III

THE WAY TO MUNICH

AUSTRIA, HITLER'S FIRST VICTIM

As the Nazi rulers of Germany prepared for war, their appetites were growing. Having strengthened the Reich's Western frontiers by the occupation of the demilitarised Rhineland and taking advantage of the overall exacerbation of the international situation, the Nazis were gradually getting down to carrying through their aggressive designs in Central and Eastern Europe. Their first object was to take hold of Austria.

The Soviet Union proceeded from the assumption that to preserve Austria's independence was an important matter of principle for the maintenance of peace in Europe. The annexation of Austria would provide Germany with good vantage-ground from which to launch her aggression against Czechoslovakia. The USSR was prepared to co-operate with other nations in the defence of Austria. As early as 1935, Litvinov wrote that the fate of Austria seriously affected the security interests of the Soviet Union. "We cannot be indifferent," he pointed out, "to any intensification of Nazi Germany whatsoever."¹ In February 1936, the Soviet Ambassador in Paris, V. P. Potemkin, reaffirmed in a conversation with the French Foreign Minister, Pierre Flandin, that the USSR was prepared to join other members of the League of Nations in imposing collective sanctions against the aggressor in the event of attack on Austria.²

On July 11, 1936, the Nazis forced the Austrian government into an agreement compelling it to concert its foreign policy with Germany. Describing that agreement and its implications for Austria, the Soviet Ambassador in Vienna, I. L. Lorents, wrote in May 1937 that Berlin kept up in its violent and brutal pressure on Austria. "There is a growing realisation here that the agreement of July 11, 1936,

in its Berlin interpretation, must be an instrument to make the Anschluß with."³

On June 24, 1937, Germany's War Minister W. Blomberg endorsed a directive for the invasion of Austria code-named "Operation Otto". As he set out his foreign policy programme to the top members of the General Staff on November 5, 1937, Hitler emphasised that "there is only one way—the way of violence" to achieve Germany's aims. The primary task was to capture Austria and Czechoslovakia. On December 7, 1937, Blomberg signed the plan of preparations for the seizure of Czechoslovakia ("Operation Grün").

Italy's accession to the Anti-Comintern Pact in November 1937, the opening of negotiations to transform that pact into a military-political alliance of the three aggressors, and Italy's withdrawal from the League of Nations a month later all pointed to the growing danger of war.

The USSR Urged Resistance to Aggressors

The Soviet Union proceeded from the belief that to keep the peace, the aggressor bloc had to be confronted by a united front of the nations interested in preventing war. The view in the USSR was that the sooner the ruling circles of Britain, France and the United States realised the need for a collective effort to safeguard peace, the easier it would be to put paid to the aggressive action by the fascist states in preparation for another world war.

The forces of peace were stronger, not weaker, than those of aggression and war. Therefore, the action by aggressors, who, besides, resorted to bluff and blackmail, could have been checked. The Soviet government was consistently pressing for urgent and united action by the peoples and nations keen on preserving peace to straitjacket the aggressors.

The League of Nations could still do much towards forestalling aggression. The aggressors, on their part, were trying hard to scuttle the League by all means to the extent of getting its Covenant revised. More particularly, they insisted on the deletion of Article 16 providing for sanctions against the aggressor. "The major driving motive be-

hind the intriguing of Beck and other agents of Germany, Italy and Japan against the League of Nations," the Soviet People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs emphasised on January 4, 1938, "is the desire to do away with the Franco-Soviet and Soviet-Czechoslovak pacts based on Article 16 of the League's Covenant."

The People's Commissar pointed out, explaining the Soviet position with regard to the League of Nations, that it would be a matter of immense political importance under the prevailing circumstances to publish a joint Anglo-Franco-Soviet Declaration in defence of the League of Nations, which the USSR had been urging for over a year. Yet Britain fought shy of such a declaration.⁵

The Soviet Union was calling most serious attention to the storm clouds gathering over Austria. The Soviet government realised that a Nazi seizure of that country would be nothing but a link in the whole chain of events which would ultimately lead to another world war. The Soviet government urged collective action to safeguard peace in Central Europe.

Chamberlain's "Riding the Tiger" Dream

In preparation for overrunning other countries, Hitler attached paramount importance, notably, to his diplomatic stock-in-trade. The Nazi foreign service was charged with the business of forestalling concerted action by the USSR, France and Britain as that would have virtually made German aggression impossible. Ribbentrop, who was appointed ambassador to Britain in 1936, lost no time in brainwashing the British ruling element, banking, above all, on their anti-communism and anti-Sovietism. For example, talking to Winston Churchill, he sought to prove that Germany was striving for friendship with Britain. She would even "stand guard for the British Empire in all its greatness and extent," but "what was required was that Britain should give Germany a free hand in the East of Europe."⁶

Ribbentrop's assurances that Germany was seeking an understanding with Britain were, naturally, sheer fraud. In one of his secret documents, Ribbentrop wrote that the task before German diplomacy with regard to German-British re-

lations was to "foster England's belief that a settlement and an understanding between Germany and England are still possible eventually", along with "quiet but determined establishment of alliances against England".⁷

Ribbentrop had the full understanding and confidence of many members of the British government because his assurances were consonant with their hopes that the Nazi aggressors would turn East, first of all.

Neville Chamberlain, Prime Minister since late May 1937, was the most consistent champion of an accommodation with Germany. Chamberlain had intestinal hatred for everything progressive. Communism was his "Enemy No. 1" and the Soviet Union an object of vicious hatred. Even British historians who have studied Chamberlain's policies could not fail to admit it. For example, Robert Sencourt stated that Soviet Russia was Chamberlain's "declared enemy".⁸

Chamberlain's political sympathies were with the extreme reactionary forces both in Britain and elsewhere. He saw Hitler and Mussolini as his class allies, first and foremost.

Chamberlain took it into his head that he was destined to carry through a two-fold plan: strangle the Soviet Union with Nazi hands and wear out the forces of Germany as Britain's imperialist rival. "Neville believes that he is a man with a mission to come to terms with the dictators",⁹ Anthony Eden pointed out in his memoirs. He believed that one could come to terms with the aggressors, and do so under conditions that would not affect the basic interests of the British Empire. Chamberlain thought, as Churchill aptly said about him, that one "can ride the tiger".

The position of Anthony Eden, as the Britain's Foreign Secretary, differed from Chamberlain's by methods of exercising foreign policy rather than by substance. Beck wrote, commenting on the pronouncements of the British Foreign Secretary in a conversation with him, that Eden had revealed an intention "to come to terms with Germany" but showed his "typical restraint" with regard to Russia.¹⁰

The policy of France was no less short-sighted. There was no doubt that the French government perfectly realised the full gravity of an impending hurricane. That meant that France should not have allowed the Nazi Reich to overrun other nations and so strengthen itself. She could have relied in that policy on her Treaty of Mutual Assistance

with the USSR, yet the French ruling circles did not wish to co-operate with the Soviet Union.

With the Popular Front government in office in 1936, it was the domestic political considerations that came to play a growing role in foreign policy options of the bourgeois parties. Whereas in earlier days, many of their leaders had favoured a firm independent foreign policy with a view to strengthening the security of the nation and, in that context, promoting co-operation with the USSR, after the victory of the Popular Front in the elections, the fear of the "Red menace" prompted most of them to collude with the aggressors "at any price", that is to betray the national interests. The same considerations had a growing influence on the right wing of the Radical Socialist Party which formed part of the Popular Front. That was true, in particular, of such leaders as Edouard Daladier, Georges Bonnet, to mention just these two, who were playing a major role in framing France's foreign policy.

The class motives behind the policies pursued by Britain as well as by France were brought out by Litvinov in his conversation with the French Ambassador to the USSR, Robert Coulondre. The People's Commissar pointed out that Britain would have sought a closer relationship with the USSR, if there had been no social hostility of Britain's dominant classes towards the Soviet Union in the way. The same can well be said about France where there are quite a few influential personalities (like Flandin) who are openly advocating a Four Power Pact.¹¹ The Soviet Ambassador to France, Surits, wrote that there was a declining intention in that country to impart an effective character to the Soviet-French Treaty of Mutual Assistance and to treat it from the standpoint of its "original designation". This treaty, like relations with the USSR in general, was being seen in France "not in the sense of general opposition to the German threat, not in the positive sense, but rather in negative: there is a prevalent desire to keep the USSR as far away from Germany as possible, and to prevent and obstruct German-Soviet rapprochement".¹²

D. Lloyd George considered the French government's repudiation of the Franco-Soviet pact to have been an act of sheer folly. Referring to the question of who could save France in the event of war, he rightfully pointed out: "Not Britain, but the USSR alone ... A victory over Germany

can be decided only by a large land army. It is the USSR alone that has such an army."¹³

Nevertheless, the ruling circles of France proceeded from the assumption that Britain was her most important ally. Yet those were utterly baseless illusions. Here is a note, made by British General Ironside, in his diary on February 6, 1938, that is particularly indicative in this respect. "Our government appears to recognise," he wrote, "that if we again land an Army in France, it must mean a repetition of the 1914-1918 struggle under more difficult circumstances. . . . The present Government has rightly made up its mind not to do this, even in the face of the danger that France may be overwhelmed."¹⁴

However, the military doctrine of the French themselves corresponded to the British one in principle. The French Vice Premier Daladier believed that France must show concern for her lines of communication with her North African colonies; for the rest she "would be able to live safely behind the Maginot Line no matter what might happen in Central and Eastern Europe".¹⁵

The government of the United States had also been informed of the aggressive plans of Nazi Germany. Assistant Secretary of State Messersmith wrote on October 11, 1937, that the plans of Nazis boiled down to the following: seizure of Austria and Czechoslovakia; establishment of Germany's domination of Southeast Europe, capture of the Ukraine; isolation of Russia; weakening of France through breaking off her alliance with Russia; gradual dismemberment of the British Empire; finally, action against the United States.¹⁶

Nevertheless, the United States, far from intending to take any steps whatsoever against the aggressors, went on encouraging the policy of accommodation with them which was pursued by the ruling establishment of Britain and France. The French Foreign Minister, Yvon Delbos, did not even conceal during his meeting with Maxim Litvinov on November 6, 1938, that the United States was pushing France into an accommodation with Germany.¹⁷ The reason behind that position of the United States, was, as Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles admitted in his memoirs, the prevalent view in the United States in the autumn of 1937 that Hitler would not go to war against the Western powers unless and until he had destroyed his true enemy—the USSR.¹⁸

American historian Frederick L. Schuman, describing the policies of Britain, France and the United States, wrote that the propertied classes of the Western powers "admired fascism and supposed that their own interests would be served by maintaining and extending fascist power". Moreover, many of the political leaders of those countries "fondly hoped and fervently believed that a free hand for the fascist Triplice . . . would eventuate in a German-Japanese attack on the Soviet Union", that "civilisation would thereby be saved from Bolshevism, and that France, Britain and America could remain neutral while fascism and communism destroyed one another".¹⁹

Striving for an understanding with the Nazis, the British government decided to send one of its most influential members, the Lord President of the Council, Lord Halifax (former Viceroy of India) to Germany. A conversation between Lord Halifax and Hitler took place on November 19, 1937. Halifax praised Hitler for having "achieved a great deal . . . by destroying Communism" in Germany which meant she "could rightly be regarded as a bulwark of the West against Bolshevism". He intimated that should there be a "general settlement" whereby Germany would have undertaken to respect the integrity of the British Empire, the British government was prepared to give her a free hand in Central and Eastern Europe. Halifax said this applied to Germany's designs on Austria, Czechoslovakia and Danzig. He qualified his statement by saying that Germany must expand without resorting to armed force.²⁰

The reservation was due, in part, to the fact that, taking into account the existence of a military alliance between France and Czechoslovakia, the British government feared that the invasion of Czechoslovakia by German forces could have led to an armed conflict which would have involved Britain next to France. And that war would have dashed all hopes of British reactionary quarters for a war between Germany and the USSR.

On November 24, Halifax reported to a British Cabinet meeting about his visit to Hitler. On hearing him, Chamberlain pointed out that the object of his tour had been to find out the German position with regard to the possibility of an Anglo-German agreement and expressed his profound satisfaction with the outcome.²¹

The French Premier, Chamberlain, and the French Foreign

Minister, Delbos, were invited to London late in November 1937 to concert the subsequent plans of the two Powers regarding the negotiations with the Reich. They seized the occasion, to specify their position in the event of German aggression against Czechoslovakia. Chamberlain firmly declared that Britain must not be involved in the war over Czechoslovakia. Delbos, setting out the position of France, noted that her treaty with Czechoslovakia would come into effect if there was an act of armed intervention by Germany but should Germany annex the Sudetenland without a direct "act of aggression", the treaty "would not come into operation".²²

That statement showed France prepared to see her ally broken up without, however, certain "rules of the game" being broken. As we shall yet see, Chamberlain would make every effort to let Germany commit all her acts of aggression without a gross violation of those "rules".

During unofficial meetings of British and French leaders, their policy was being discussed even more frankly. Delbos, on arrival in Warsaw after his visit to London, described the mood prevalent in Britain: "Chamberlain is convinced that there is no other way to follow and that it is worthwhile coming to terms on co-operation with Germany and Italy." It was clear from the talks with the British, the French Minister said, that "London has turned sour on the USSR" and that "Britain has no objection to the USSR staying outside the Pact and, even more, to a conflict erupting between Germany and the USSR."²³

The talks which took place in London made it clear that neither Britain nor France were going to afford any help and support to Czechoslovakia if Germany sought to carry through her plans without resorting to outright aggression. Still less did they mean to oppose Germany's take-over of Austria.

When the results of the Anglo-French negotiations came up for consideration at a British Cabinet meeting, Chamberlain reported that "an understanding was reached to continue the effort to seek a general settlement with Germany".²⁴ The items to be thrashed out in an Anglo-German agreement were examined in detail at a meeting of the British government's Foreign Policy Committee on January 24 and February 3, 1938. The question of the Soviet-French and Soviet-Czechoslovak treaties of mutual assistance was

also taken up. The Cabinet members who attended the meeting did not conceal that they found those treaties to be hindrance to an accommodation with Germany. The British Ambassador in Berlin, Neville Henderson, who was taking part in the discussion, said point-blank that "it would first be necessary for Czechoslovakia to escape from the arrangements she had made with Soviet Russia".²⁵

Nor did Hitler have any reason to be concerned over the position of the ruling circles of the United States. Soviet Ambassador A. A. Troyanovsky stated on March 2, 1938, that "the fate of Austria is not arousing any particular anxiety over here. Isolationists of all stripes are generally prepared to put up with all fascist annexations".²⁶

The Anschluss

Early in March 1938, Hitler speeded up the drive to seize Austria. To make sure of his stakes, former German Ambassador in London von Ribbentrop now appointed Germany's Foreign Minister, arrived in London on March 10 to "take leave". Chamberlain and Halifax used the occasion to offer Hitler their heart and soul.²⁷

There was another meeting on the same day, not so official, yet no less important. That was the meeting of Horacio Wilson, Chamberlain's closest adviser, who clearly had the latter's instruction to disclose more of the British government's cherished plans to the Nazis, with an official of Ribbentrop's staff, Erich Kordt. Wilson declared that Chamberlain was determined "to persist in his policy of bringing about an understanding with Germany and Italy". Referring to co-operation between the West European powers and revealing the British government's ultimate objective, Wilson stressed: "Russia ought to be left out entirely at the present time. The system there was bound to melt away some day."²⁸

Ribbentrop immediately reported to Hitler about the initial results of the assignment he had carried out to find out the position Britain would take up "if the Austrian question cannot be settled peacefully". He expressed his conviction that Britain would offer no opposition. Chamberlain and Halifax were trying, Ribbentrop wrote, "to reach a peaceful understanding among the four Great Powers of Europe without the Soviet Union".²⁹

Hitler found once more that he could go ahead with his plans without fear of intervention by the Western powers. On March 11 he issued his directive for the invasion of Austria. "Unless other means achieve the end", he wrote in that directive, "I propose to enter Austria with my armed forces."³⁰ On orders from Berlin, the Austrian Nazis made a take-or-leave-it demand to Chancellor K. Schuschnigg of Austria to resign and to be succeeded by the Führer of local Nazis Seyß-Inquart. In the night of March 12, Hitler's forces crossed into Austria and got her annexed to Germany. That act of the Nazis was in no way opposed by Britain, France or the United States. As one can see from a note in Chamberlain's diary on March 13, in spite of the Anschluss he still hoped to start the Anglo-German talks again some day.³¹

It should, however, be pointed out that neither London nor Paris, nor Washington could fail to realise that the Anschluss was the beginning of the end of the Versailles-Washington system of treaties which served as a prop for their dominant position both in Europe and in the rest of the world. Ambassador Maisky wrote on March 12, 1938, that there was "clear confusion" within the British ruling circles following the Nazi seizure of Austria. "The Premier's prestige has been struck hard and the chances of an early realisation of a Four Power Pact have come to nought right away."³²

The Nazi annexation of Austria went far towards straining the situation in Europe. On March 14, the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs stated that it appeared to be the major development since the First World War and one "fraught with the greatest perils and, not in the least, for our Union".³³

Referring to Germany's seizure of Austria, the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Litvinov, pointed out in an interview that in the last few years the Soviet government had more than once denounced international crimes and declared itself to be prepared to "take an active part in all the measures directed towards organising collective resistance to the aggressor". The Soviet government condemned the armed invasion of Austria and the act of violence in depriving the Austrian people of their independence.³⁴

At the same time the Soviet Union was exposing those

who, by their policy of compromising with the aggressors, made the German takeover of Austria possible and paved the way for Hitler to Vienna. It is quite certain, *Pravda* pointed out, that the unbridled fascist aggression is a direct consequence of Chamberlain's political strategy. "His policy of an explicit collusion with the aggressors and of renouncing the system of collective security has given the warmongers a free hand."³⁵

With Austria annexed to the Reich, a direct danger faced Czechoslovakia.

The Polish Ultimatum to Lithuania

The reactionary ruling circles of Poland, who dreamed of grabbing more land for themselves, that of the Soviet Union, first and foremost, were not idle either. The U.S. Ambassador in Warsaw, A. J. Drexel Biddle, arrived at the conclusion, drawn from his conversations with the Polish Foreign Minister, J. Beck, that Poland was striving for a close relationship with Germany and welcoming German-Italian co-operation in opposition to communist Russia for she regarded her as her main enemy.³⁶ The Nazis proceeded from the belief that Poland's home and foreign policies fit in perfectly with those of Germany, Italy and Japan, and she should, therefore, be brought into the Anti-Comintern Pact. They made appropriate suggestions to her on several occasions.³⁷ Finding it inconvenient to join the Anti-Comintern Pact openly (at least for the time being), Poland declared herself to be in solidarity with the signatories to the Pact in many ways, including her policy towards the USSR. On June 13, 1938, Beck told Germany's Foreign Minister von Neurath that he considered combatting Bolshevism "the primary aim of his policy".³⁸ On March 31, the new German Foreign Minister, von Ribbentrop, took the opportunity of his conversation with the Polish Ambassador in Berlin, Józef Lipski, to express his "haunting idea of broad anti-communist co-operation". The Polish Ambassador replied by saying that he was convinced that co-operation between Germany and Poland "in the struggle against communism" was well worthwhile.³⁹ Whetting

the appetites of the Polish ruling establishment, the Nazis made a point of telling Poland that it was "not enough" for her to have an outlet to the Baltic Sea, and that she must also have an "outlet to the Black Sea".⁴⁰

Polish ruling circles had Lithuania, too, as yet another object of their aggressive aspirations. In the night of March 11, Polish frontier guards provoked an incident on the Polish-Lithuanian border to create a pretext for a Polish invasion of Lithuania. The Polish rulers of the day saw the takeover of Lithuania as a "compensation" for the support they gave to Germany's aggressive plans against Austria.⁴¹ The Polish *Przegląd Powszechny* magazine wrote: "We must get some compensation because of the Anschluss... Qualitatively, because of her geopolitical position, Lithuania is very valuable."⁴²

An emergency conference was called in Warsaw on March 12, attended by the Inspector-General of the Armed Forces Rydz-Smigly, Premier F. Skladkowski, and J. Szembek who deputised for Beck while he was out of Warsaw. It was decided to press for the political subordination of Lithuania to Poland.⁴³

A large Polish force was concentrated near the Lithuanian border poised for an invasion of Lithuania at any moment.

Poland and Nazi Germany acted in the closest contact. For instance, during Beck's visit to Berlin in January 1938 Göring informed him that Germany considered the Anschluss to be her top priority. Hitler emphasised that he was prepared to resort to force to this end. Beck told the Nazis that Poland had no objection to the Anschluss: "Poland has only economic interests" in Austria; we have no political interests in that country".⁴⁴ During the subsequent discussions with Göring, on February 23 and March 12, Beck and Lipski reaffirmed their statements that Poland did not object to Germany taking over Austria. Göring replied that Hitler "will be obliged to Poland for such a stand".⁴⁵

It was as early as March 16 of the same year that the Nazis "repaid" the Polish ruling circles. On that day Göring invited Lipski to talk over subsequent German and Polish co-operation. The Polish Ambassador informed him of Poland's designs on Lithuania. In the same terms in which the Poles had couched their consent to the annexation of

Austria by Germany, Göring announced Germany's consent to Poland's seizure of Lithuania, hedging it in only with a remark regarding Klaipeda. Lipski wrote that Göring showed understanding for our point of view. He stressed Germany's interest in Klaipeda (Memel), otherwise expressing his *désintéressement* with regard to Lithuania".⁴⁶ Göring expressed some apprehension, however, that Poland's action might cause complications in her relations with the USSR. In that context, he came out with "an open offer for Polish-German military collaboration against Russia". Lipski immediately notified Warsaw of the position taken by the German government on "Poland's possible action against Lithuania", that is, regarding an invasion of Lithuania by Polish troops.

A German invasion of Lithuania was also in the preparatory stage. On March 17, Beck instructed the Polish Minister in Berlin to inform Göring confidentially that "relations with Lithuania got strained not only because of the frontier incident". Lipski was to declare that in case of a rejection of the Polish ultimatum by Lithuania, there would be an invasion of Lithuania by Polish forces, and "German interests in Klaipeda would be respected by the Polish side". Lipski lost no time in carrying out that instruction and assured Göring that he would be keeping the German government abreast of the subsequent course of events. Lipski considered the conversation to have been extremely important because that allowed him to inform Warsaw about Germany's stand on "Poland's possible action against Lithuania".⁴⁷ That is to say, Poland intended to take over Lithuania, with the exception of Klaipeda which she was prepared to "cede" to Germany.

Germany's intentions were to be seen from Ribbentrop's note of March 17. "In case of a Polish-Lithuanian conflict", he wrote, "I consider the occupation of the Memel Territory necessary within the first few hours. Appropriate preparations for this have been made". The Chief of the High Command of the Armed Forces, Keitel had prepared a special map showing the German-Polish line of demarcation on the territory of Lithuania, according to which the German forces were to occupy Klaipeda Territory along with some other areas of Lithuania.⁴⁸

Lithuania found herself face to face with the fatal dan-

ger from two aggressors at once—Poland and Germany, acting in close contact.

It was Soviet support alone that saved the Lithuanian people from being enslaved by foreign invaders. On March 16, 1938, the Soviet People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs summoned the Polish Ambassador in Moscow, W. Grzybowski, to tell him that the gravity of the situation compelled the Soviet government to draw the Polish government's attention to the fact that the Soviet Union could not stand by, looking indifferently at Lithuania in danger.⁴⁹

Meanwhile the Soviet government took steps to influence Poland through her ally, France. The People's Commissar gave instructions to the Soviet Ambassador in Paris to see the French Foreign Minister Paul-Boncour immediately and urge him to take the necessary steps in order to "deter Warsaw from undertaking a reckless venture that can set the whole of Eastern Europe on fire". The Ambassador was also to inform the French Minister about the statement made to Grzybowski.⁵⁰ On March 18, the Soviet government, considering the continued aggravation of the situation, gave the Polish Ambassador another strong warning.⁵¹

The Soviet government's intervention prevented Lithuania from being overrun by Poland and Germany. Besides, those events were the best evidence possible to show that the aggressors would have stood no chance of success, in other parts of Europe as well, should the Western powers have acted together with the Soviet Union instead of yielding ground to the aggressors.

The Polish rulers, however, did not give up their aggressive aspirations. The Polish ministers in Bucharest A. Arciszewski sought to prove to the Romanian King that Hitler Germany was stronger than the Soviet Union and that, in case of an impending war, Poland would join a bloc consisting of Germany, Italy, Finland, Latvia, Estonia, Hungary, Austria and Bulgaria; Poland would welcome the accession of Romania and, together with her—Yugoslavia and Greece—in that bloc.⁵² In July 1937, the Chiefs of General Staffs of Poland and Romania concluded an agreement under which Poland committed herself to fielding 350,000 soldiers and Romania, 250,000 in the event of war against the USSR. It was decided that should the territory thus acquired fall into their hands, it would be divided between

them: the territory south of the Vinnitsa—Kiev—Desna river line, comprising Odessa, would be annexed by Romania and those North of that line, comprising Leningrad, by Poland.⁵³

As will yet be shown, Poland closely co-operated with the Nazi Reich in the aggression against Czechoslovakia as well.

OPPOSITE REACTIONS TO GERMANY'S AGGRESSIVE PLANS AGAINST CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Operation "Grün"

After the annexation of Austria, the German General Staff got down, under instructions from Hitler, to laying the ground for the seizure of Czechoslovakia (Operation "Grün"). In the military sense, the capture of Czechoslovakia was an uneasy task, however. Germany had not yet completed her preparations for a major war. At the same time, the Czechoslovak Army was rightfully considered one of the best armies in capitalist Europe in terms of its equipment and combat training. A fortified belt, patterned after the Maginot Line, had been installed in those regions of Czechoslovakia which bordered on Germany.

Besides, Czechoslovakia had treaties of mutual assistance with the two major powers of Europe—the USSR and France. For that reason, the Nazi foreign service found an international isolation (neutralising) of Czechoslovakia to be its most important objective. Considering that she was a connecting link between various alliances (like the Little Entente), created by France during the inter-war period, the Nazis counted on getting all those alliances dismantled by neutralising Czechoslovakia. Both for the sake of carrying out their operation "Grün" and for facilitating the implementation of other aggressive plans, the Nazis were still pressing for the international isolation of the Soviet Union.⁵⁴

The "Fifth Column" of the Nazis in Czechoslovakia—their agents among the Sudeten Germans—was charged with the mission of blowing the nation up from inside so as to reduce its ability to resist. On March 28, 1938, Hitler gave his instructions to Henlein, the führer of the Sudeten

German fascists, to get more active and confront the government of Czechoslovakia with demands that would be clearly unacceptable to it.⁵⁵

*Collective Resistance
to Aggression Urged*

The Soviet government had every reason to believe that the German aggressors could still have been checked, should they have had a united front of non-aggressor nations standing up against them. It considered it necessary, in particular, to prevent the Nazis overrunning Czechoslovakia.

The Soviet Union was prepared to make its sizable contribution to peace-keeping. It had enough forces and possibilities for that. Following the successful fulfilment of its Second Five-Year Plan, the Soviet Union came to lead Europe and rank second in the world (after the U.S.) in industrial output.

The USSR was determined to take all the necessary measures to avert a further expansion of the German aggression and, in particular, to carry out its commitments under the Treaty of Mutual Assistance with Czechoslovakia. On March 15, 1938, Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs V. P. Potemkin assured Czechoslovak Minister in Moscow Zdeněk Fierlinger that, in the event of an attack on Czechoslovakia, the Soviet government would fulfil its allied commitments in full. At the same time, a similar statement by the Soviet government was communicated to the governments of France and Great Britain.⁵⁶

On March 17, the Soviet People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs made an official statement regarding the exacerbation of the situation in Europe. He noted that the German annexation of Austria, situated in Central Europe, had created an indisputable danger to all European nations. Referring to the obligations devolving on the USSR from the Covenant of the League of Nations and the treaties of mutual assistance with France and Czechoslovakia, the People's Commissar declared that the Soviet government "is still prepared to participate in collective action that could be decided on in co-operation with it and would have the object of arresting the continued development of aggression and removing the increased danger of another world shambles.

It is willing to start immediate discussions with other powers in or outside the League of Nations on all practical steps dictated by the circumstances. Tomorrow it may be too late, but today there is still the time for it, if all the nations and, in particular, the Great Powers, take up a firm and unequivocal position with regard to the problem of collective peace keeping."⁵⁷

The texts of this statement were forwarded to the governments of Britain, France, the United States, Czechoslovakia, the Balkan, Baltic and Scandinavian states as well as Poland, Belgium and Turkey.

The British Ambassador in Moscow Lord Chilton, admitted, as he conferred with Maxim Litvinov on March 19, 1938, that the Soviet government's statement has touched off a great movement among the British members of parliament. To explain the substance of this statement, the People's Commissar said that it had to be understood as an invitation to start negotiations and the venue and timing of these negotiations can be considered, depending on reaction from the Western powers. It is necessary, he pointed out, to find out the opinion of the countries concerned in advance so that "the invitations to the conference could be sent out".⁵⁸

The Soviet Union's proposal for collective action to safeguard peace had, however, no support from the Western powers.

*Accommodation with
the Aggressor Sought*

The British government persisted in its earlier course of action, witness Neville Chamberlain's utterances at a meeting of the government's Foreign Policy Committee on March 15. "The Prime Minister", said the minutes of the meeting, "did not think that anything that had happened should cause the Government to alter their present policy, on the contrary, recent events had confirmed him in his opinion that that policy was a right one and he only regretted that it had not been adopted earlier."⁵⁹ This opinion was shared by Lord Halifax. He declared in a conversation with Czechoslovak Minister in London Jan Masaryk that he did not want to give up altogether the hope that an accommodation with Germany could still be found some day.⁶⁰

On March 18, Foreign Office presented for the consideration by the British government's Foreign Policy Committee a thoroughly elaborated Memorandum on the Czechoslovak question, pointing out that the British government had to choose between three options:

1. Conclusion of a "grand alliance" with the participation of France and other countries against aggression (as proposed by Winston Churchill in the House of Commons on March 14).

2. Commitment to afford assistance to France in the event of her honouring her contractual obligations with regard to Czechoslovakia.

3. No new commitments to France.⁶¹

On the same day, the question was carefully examined at a meeting of the government's Foreign Policy Committee. The tune was called by Chamberlain, Halifax and the Minister for Co-ordination of Defence, Thomas Inskip, who came out against the first two possible options for British policy.

Foreign Secretary Halifax intimated in his statement that there should be no obstacles in the way of an accommodation with Germany. "The more closely we associated ourselves with France and Russia", he maintained, "the more difficult would it be to make any real settlement with Germany." At the end of the meeting, Halifax, summing it up, stated the general view that Britain must decline to undertake any fresh commitment, and must try and persuade the Czechs and the French that "the best course would be for Czechoslovakia to make the best terms she could with Germany".⁶²

The decisions taken at that meeting were put at the root of the entire subsequent activity of the British foreign service. It saw its main task in preventing France from affording assistance to Czechoslovakia, which could have got Britain involved in a war against the Third Reich. And that would have meant the failure of Chamberlain's entire foreign policy line directed towards achieving agreement with Germany. It was the "solution of the Sudeten problem", that is, the incorporation of the Sudetenland in Germany by "peaceful means" that the British government considered to be the major precondition for such an accommodation under the circumstances of the day. That was the course that was "crowned with success" in Munich.

In a note of March 22, 1938, to the French government Britain announced that she did not find it possible to assume any fresh commitments in Europe and that France could not count on Britain's assistance in the event of her going to war to lend a helping hand to Czechoslovakia.⁶³

It was still believed necessary in London to draw Berlin's attention to the possibility of Britain being embroiled in war contrary to her own will, should Germany resort to acts of outright armed aggression to expand into Central Europe. Speaking in the House of Commons on March 24, Neville Chamberlain made an official statement to the effect that Britain did not propose to assume any further commitments in Europe. But should a war break out, he said, "it would be well within the bounds of probability that other countries, besides those which were parties to the original dispute, would almost immediately be involved. This is especially true in the case of two countries like Great Britain and France, with long associations of friendship, with interests closely interwoven..."⁶⁴ The Chamberlain government was, therefore, "persuading" Berlin to refrain from launching an armed conflict by virtually assuring Nazi Germany that she would be able to achieve her ends by other means.

This position of the British ruling establishment rested on the hope that having carried out their aggressive plans against Czechoslovakia, German aggressors would keep moving east. By building their policies on such false hopes, the British reactionaries left the vital interests of the British people exposed to a mortal danger because the Nazis were planning to go to war against Britain first and against the USSR afterwards. That is why it was Britain, above all, that would be assuring her own security in the event of co-operation with the USSR. That short-sighted approach of British politicians was particularly evident from Ribbentrop's directive of April 19, 1938, to the State Secretary at the German Foreign Ministry: "Russia should be officially called enemy, but in reality everything must be directed against England."⁶⁵

The Soviet proposal of March 17 for urgent steps to be taken to resist aggression was not so much as mentioned at any of the meetings of the British government and its Foreign Policy Committee in those days. The negative attitude to it had been shaped in advance by the general foreign

policy course of Britain's ruling establishment. However, since the Soviet proposal had fetched widespread response from many nations, Chamberlain found himself constrained to touch on it in his foreign policy speech in Parliament on March 24. He expressed his displeasure with the fact that the object of this proposal was "to negotiate such mutual undertakings in advance to resist aggression" and declared it to be unacceptable to the British government.⁶⁶

Neither did France support the Soviet proposal of March 17, although the Anschluß represented an outright danger to her ally, Czechoslovakia. The Czechoslovak question was examined at a meeting of the Permanent Committee of National Defence under the chairmanship of Edouard Daladier on March 15. It was the defeatist standpoint that prevailed in the debate. Daladier asserted that France was not in a position to lend Czechoslovakia "any immediate assistance"; she can only pin down German forces on the Franco-German border by a mobilisation. Members of the Committee took up a negative stand on the question of possible co-operation with the USSR in affording assistance to Czechoslovakia. The conclusion reached at the end of the meeting was that France "cannot impede action against Czechoslovakia". French statesmen refusing to co-operate with the Soviet Union were actually leaving their ally, Czechoslovakia, at the mercy of Nazi Germany.⁶⁷

In a letter of April 4, to the Soviet embassy in Paris, the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, describing the policy of France, pointed out that in spite of the extreme tension of the international situation, the French government was not changing anything about its position of indecision, inactivity and credulity in the face of the events creating a direct danger to general peace and outright menace to France proper. Neither the annexation of Austria by Germany, nor the critical situation of Czechoslovakia, or the Polish ultimatum to Lithuania, or the appearance of German and Italian troops on the border between Spain and France, nor, ultimately, the arrogant pronouncements of Mussolini who was threatening war against Europe, "could wake the French up, make them change their mind and do something at least for their own self-defence".⁶⁸

The position of the United States was likewise of essential importance under the circumstances of the day. The U.S. Government left the Soviet proposal of March 17

unanswered. U.S. Secretary of State Cordell Hull, retracing the background to this issue in his *Memoirs*, wrote that in view of the fact that the American response, "under the limitations of our policy against entanglements, must be negative and might therefore discourage Russia", it was found that the best course would be to send no answer at all.⁶⁹ In a directive letter to the Soviet Ambassador in Washington, the Soviet People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, commenting on the U.S. stand, said: "Roosevelt and Hull keep treating the world to their homilies while doing nothing for the sake of peace. Seen against the background of the Neutrality Act still in force and unlimited arms supplies to Japan, the afore-said homilies look revolting."⁷⁰

It was hoped in Washington that the Nazi Reich, engaged in its aggression against the East, would not represent any particular danger to the United States. American historians Langer and Gleason pointed out that Roosevelt was "not particularly bothered" by the Anschluß. "He was convinced that Hitler would embark on his Eastern venture."⁷¹

The Soviet Union True to Its Commitments

The Soviet government attached paramount importance to preventing Germany from overrunning Czechoslovakia. The Czechoslovak Minister in the USSR, Zdenek Fierlinger, reported to Prague on April 23, 1938, that he had received a message from the Soviet Ambassador to Czechoslovakia, S. S. Alexandrovsky, who was in Moscow at the time, for transmission to the Czechoslovak government, which said, in particular: "The USSR, should it be asked for it, is prepared to take all the steps required, together with France and Czechoslovakia to ensure the security of Czechoslovakia. It has all the necessary means at its disposal for this purpose. The condition of the Army and the Air Force permitted it to do so."⁷² On April 27, the Czechoslovak Minister stressed in a conversation with Potemkin that this position of the Soviet government was "very encouraging for the Czechoslovaks".⁷³

The People's Commissar for Defence, Kliment Voroshilov, told the British military attaché in Moscow, R. Fire-

brace, on May 2, 1938, that the Soviet Union would certainly loyally honour all its commitments under the treaty with Czechoslovakia.⁷⁴ In virtue of that treaty, the Soviet Union was to provide assistance to her only if France did likewise. That did not mean that the Soviet government could not afford any assistance to Czechoslovakia without waiting for France to enter into the war beforehand, should Czechoslovakia have offered resistance to the aggressor and asked the USSR for help against the German aggression. Although, consequent upon the Nazi annexation of Austria, the situation in Europe had seriously deteriorated, the position of Czechoslovakia was not hopeless. In a crucial moment, should Czechoslovakia have given a determined rebuff to the aggressors, there could still have been a collective front of struggle against the fascist invaders.

The matter was brought up, for example, by Mikhail Kalinin, President of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, in his report on April 26, 1938. After setting out the terms of the Soviet-Czechoslovak Treaty, he added: "Naturally, this Pact does not forbid either party to come to the other's aid without waiting for Franco to do so."⁷⁵ The same issue was touched upon by Stalin during his conversation with Klement Gottwald, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in the middle of May 1938.⁷⁶

Describing the Soviet position, the French Ambassador in Moscow, Coulondre, wrote to Paris that the USSR was earnestly striving for co-operation with the Western powers over Czechoslovakia.⁷⁷

Big Stick Mediators

In the meantime, the governments of Britain, France and the United States went ahead with the policy of abetting German aggression.

The British government's foreign policy course showed itself once again quite clearly in connection with the Anglo-French talks. A British Cabinet meeting on April 27 was to work out the British position at these talks. Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax proposed telling the French that Britain was "anxious to pursue the interrupted negotiations" with Germany.⁷⁸

The same Cabinet meeting heard a clear exposition of Britain's attitude to the issue of military commitments in relation to France. We shall yet see how persistently Britain was avoiding any commitment to the USSR during the Anglo-Franco-Soviet talks in the summer of 1939. It was reaffirmed at the Cabinet meeting that the Chamberlain government did not want to assume any commitments whatsoever with regard to France either. So, in summing up the discussion during the Cabinet meeting, Lord Halifax declared that, by common consent of the Cabinet members, Britain "could not undertake any commitment to send troops to the continent". While considering it necessary to keep France on the leash, he pointed out that the French should not be told that the British would not send troops under any circumstances. It was likewise decided that should the British still find it necessary to send their troops to France, the strength of the troops to be sent at the start of the war would not exceed two divisions, although that would shock the French very strongly. As to Czechoslovakia, it was decided to tell the French once more that Britain could not undertake any military commitment to send troops to the continent.⁷⁹

A new French government was formed on April 10, 1938, with the key posts filled by the partisans of an accommodation with Germany—Edouard Daladier as the head of government and Georges Bonnet as Minister for Foreign Affairs. The position of France was increasingly defeatist.

The Chief of the French General Staff, general Gamelin, told British War Secretary Hore-Belisha two weeks later that it was "impossible for France to give military assistance to Czechoslovakia".⁸⁰

The Anglo-French conversations, held in London on April 28 and 29, showed both countries to be inclined to stick to their former policies on the Czechoslovak question. Chamberlain, for example, flatly declared to the French that in case of France providing assistance to Czechoslovakia, Britain would stay out.⁸¹ The British ministers were also pressing for the French to "become more aloof from the Russians".⁸² Daladier and Bonnet declared that they were determined to press "any solution" on Czechoslovakia to the extent of making her neutral if only they could avoid war in that way.⁸³

It was agreed that the British would intensify their "me-

diation" between Berlin and Prague with a view to "settling" the Czechoslovak question without war. The sum and substance of the agreement reached was formulated by Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Cadogan in the following way: "Agreed we should both urge Beneš to do his utmost and that *we* should ask Berlin what they want."⁸⁴

The British government did intensify its "mediation". Under its instructions, the British Minister in Prague, C. Newton, called on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Czechoslovakia and made a statement trying hard to prove the "absolute necessity" of yielding ground to the Nazis.⁸⁵

On the other hand, the British embassy informed the German Foreign Ministry on May 9, 1938, that should the Germans confidentially advise what solution of the Sudeten German question they were striving after, "the British Government would bring such pressure to bear in Prague that the Czechoslovak Government would be compelled to accede to the German wishes".⁸⁶

Although France had a treaty of mutual assistance with Czechoslovakia, the French government considered it possible to honour its commitments to Czechoslovakia only if Britain declared herself to be willing also to come to Czechoslovakia's aid. Since there was no intention in London to lend any assistance to Czechoslovakia, neither did France intend to come out in her support. The French government had virtually abandoned an independent foreign policy of her own by that time and was meekly following in the wake of Britain's policy of seeking an accommodation with Germany. Yet the French ruling circles did not venture to renounce in public their obligations under the treaty with Czechoslovakia. Having admitted in a conversation with the U.S. Chargé d'Affaires that without Britain France did not intend to afford any assistance to Czechoslovakia, the French Minister for Foreign Affairs Bonnet said, however, that "publicly he would have to state the opposite" just as the French government did.⁸⁷

The Czechoslovak ruling circles were also increasingly inclined to take up a defeatist stance. On May 17, President Beneš said in a conversation with British Minister Newton that Czechoslovakia's relations with the USSR "had always been and would remain a secondary consideration, dependent on the attitude of France and Great Britain...

If Western Europe disinterested herself in Russia, Czechoslovakia would also be disinterested."⁸⁸

While in Geneva in mid-May 1938, at a session of the Council of the League of Nations, the Soviet People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Litvinov, met the French and British foreign ministers, Bonnet and Halifax. Bonnet, in particular, wanted to know what position the USSR would take in the event of German aggression against Czechoslovakia. As the People's Commissar reported to Moscow, the French Minister put the matter in such a way as to betray his desire to get an answer that would be tantamount to a Soviet refusal of assistance to Czechoslovakia. He clearly wanted to take advantage of that answer in order to make it easier for France to escape her commitments with regard to Czechoslovakia.⁸⁹ Replying, the People's Commissar said it was desirable for representatives of the French, Soviet and Czechoslovak General Staffs to consider some military action that could be taken by the three nations.⁹⁰ Yet Bonnet did not respond to that important initiative.

Neither did Halifax display any interest in co-operation with the USSR. When Litvinov reminded him of the Soviet statement of March 17, 1938, about the Soviet readiness to join in collective action against aggression and to take part in a conference of the nations concerned in order to agree on the necessary steps to be taken, Halifax ignored them. After criticising Britain's policy on Germany, the People's Commissar set out the Soviet "concept of collective security which, if put into effect, would have saved Abyssinia, Austria, Czechoslovakia and China".⁹¹

Meanwhile, the Nazis set about their business with more dispatch. There was to be a municipal election in Czechoslovakia on May 22. With that date drawing nearer, the Nazi organisations of Sudeten Germans had drastically intensified their action. They attempted to make the election look like a referendum on the future of Sudeten region. In the meantime German troops began to be concentrated in secret across the border of Czechoslovakia.⁹² There was enough reason to fear that Sudeten Germans might provoke some disorder on May 22 which would come about together with a German invasion of Czechoslovakia. That entailed a quite natural, though partial, call-up in Czechoslovakia. It was carried through swiftly and in an organised way, and the Czechoslovak Army was determined to beat back the aggressors,

Fearful of an armed conflict, the British and French ruling circles were in utter confusion. The French government found it necessary to make yet another public statement to the effect that it would support Czechoslovakia. The British government, too, had to react, willy-nilly, to the events which were taking place. It decided, however, not to go beyond its statement of March 24 whose essence was that Germany had to engage in "guess-work" about Britain's position in case of war breaking out. The Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Cadogan, had put it down in his *Diaries* that his discussion of Britain's position with Halifax produced the following result: "Decided, we must *not* go to war." After that, Cadogan pointed out, he sent the British Ambassador in Berlin, Henderson, the text of a statement to the German government which did not, however, have any serious meaning.⁹³

The British government, therefore, virtually avoided considering the situation as it shaped up. There was no decision to change its earlier course. The British diplomatic service did not propose to warn the Nazis seriously about anything, still less threaten them with the possibility of Britain entering the war. Cadogan had a perfect idea that there was no point in one more British "demarche".

On May 21, the German government was handed a British statement saying that in the event of a German-Czechoslovak conflict, France would be obliged to intervene, and under those circumstances British government "could not guarantee that they would not be forced by circumstances to become involved also. This point was quite clearly expressed by the Prime Minister in the House of Commons on March 24." Meanwhile, the British government assured Hitler that it was doing its utmost to promote a "peaceful solution" of the Sudeten question and for that reason urged it to "exercise patience".⁹⁴

Consequently, the British had virtually assured the Nazis that they would help them achieve their aims without war. Hitler's aide, Captain F. Wiedemann, pointed out that the British had let the Germans know: "Bombs on Prague mean war. Tactics against the Czechs: not to shoot but to strangle."⁹⁵

At the same time, Britain's ruling establishment was doing everything to forestall possible assistance to Czechoslovakia from France. Having studied the French govern-

ment's statement of May 21, to the effect that it was prepared to honour its commitments to Czechoslovakia, the British decided to call their French allies to order. Halifax told British Ambassador in Paris Phipps to warn the French that Britain on her part would not go beyond the statement made by the Prime Minister in Parliament on March 24."⁹⁶ On May 22, Phipps officially declared to Bonnet that the British government was not obliged or inclined to assist France unless she joined the war to defend Czechoslovakia from German aggression. Moreover, the British government demanded that, before taking any steps which were likely to exacerbate the situation and lead to war, the French should consult the British government.⁹⁷

The Chamberlain government undertook, besides, yet another demarche in Prague to force Czechoslovakia into surrender. Alluding to a meeting at the Foreign Office Cadogan said it had "decided to use big stick on Beneš".⁹⁸

The French government was also exerting mounting pressure on Czechoslovakia. The Nazis were immediately informed about those moves and took them as evidence that Czechoslovakia would have to surrender even without war.

The Soviet Union was still the only country that was, indeed, ready and willing to render assistance to Czechoslovakia under the terms of the treaty with her in that hour of danger.

In a conversation with the Czechoslovak Minister in the USSR, Fierlinger, Litvinov welcomed the steps taken by Czechoslovakia. People's Commissar of Defence K. Y. Voroshilov "earnestly spoke about the full readiness of the USSR for cooperation" when he met the Czechoslovak General O. Husak.⁹⁹

The government of Czechoslovakia had more than once thanked the Soviet government for having supported Czechoslovakia in what were extremely hard times and dangerous circumstances for her. The Soviet Ambassador in Prague, Alexandrovsky, pointed out in the transcript of his conversation with Czechoslovakia's Foreign Minister on May 30, 1938: "Krofta has repeatedly expressed his unreserved gratitude in rather warm terms for the steady and sure support he has had from the USSR during the recent critical period. The certainty that the USSR intends quite seriously and without any hesitation to offer assistance to

Czechoslovakia in case she should really need it, has a very reassuring and encouraging effect on Czechoslovakia." ¹⁰⁰

The May crisis showed with striking evidence once again that the British ruling circles did not intend to offer any resistance to the Nazi aggressors. They had actually brought the action of the French and Czechoslovak governments under their own control. Chamberlain and his fellow thinkers thereby counted on acting as supreme judge capable of making the victim of the aggression surrender without any resistance.

Although, as the material just referred to indicates, the British government did not exercise any restraining influence on Germany during the May crisis, after the crisis British propaganda worked hard to prove that Germany had yielded ground because of Britain's resolution. Even British historians admitted that "British minister proved not unwilling to claim credit for the stand which they had not actually made". ¹⁰¹

To sum up, the May crisis confirmed that Britain and France, far from countering the German aggression against Czechoslovakia, were, in fact, aiding and abetting it. It became obvious that in spite of public declarations, the French government had actually recanted its treaties both with Czechoslovakia and with the Soviet Union.

With the position of Britain and France, as it was, the Nazi Reich went on preparing for its aggression against Czechoslovakia. At a conference with Göring, Ribbentrop, Keitel, Brauchitsch, and some more of his associates, on May 28, 1938, Hitler declared that he was determined that "Czechoslovakia shall disappear from the map of the world". That would, he said, "clear the rear for advancing against the West, England and France". Two days later, on May 30, Hitler endorsed a new plan to seize Czechoslovakia. It opened with his words: "It is my unalterable decision to smash Czechoslovakia by military action in the near future." ¹⁰² The issue of these directives was followed by feverish preparations in the Nazi Reich for an attack on Czechoslovakia. The precise date—"Day X"—was chosen and fixed for these preparations to be completed so that Hitler could decide on the invasion at any moment afterwards, depending on the general situation. The original date was October 1, but the final "Day X" was September 28, 1938,

Pressure Turning into Threat

British diplomacy did everything possible to help Nazis carry through their plan for an international isolation of Czechoslovakia. The British Conservatives believed that the best means of achieving that end was by keeping France in every way possible from lending assistance to Czechoslovakia. The more so since French involvement in war could lead to Britain getting involved as well. ¹⁰³

Britain's policy in relation to Czechoslovakia was set out in the above-mentioned statement by the British Ambassador in Paris, Phipps, to the French on May 22. Replying to it, Bonnet gave firm assurances that France would not resort to any military action without having consulted the British government. He emphasised that should Czechoslovakia turn out to be "unreasonable", "the French Government might well declare that France considered herself released from her bond". ¹⁰⁴

Halifax brought the question of Britain's subsequent political course before the British Cabinet meeting on May 25. After pointing out that the French government was constantly expressing its apprehension lest they should face a dilemma of having to choose between the risk of war and dishonour, Halifax considered it necessary "to obtain a release for the French from their obligation". He suggested that Czechoslovakia should be made neutral. Britain found it inconvenient to urge that the treaties of alliance between Czechoslovakia and France and Russia should be scrapped, but, he said, with Czechoslovakia neutralised, "the Alliances would automatically disappear". Chamberlain and the rest of the Cabinet approved the course of action Halifax had proposed. ¹⁰⁵

The U.S. Ambassador to Britain, Joseph Kennedy, back in London from a visit to the United States, assured German Ambassador von Dirksen that the U.S. government supported the Chamberlain cabinet, including "its desire for a settlement with Germany". ¹⁰⁶

Paris, following in the wake of London, was increasingly inclined to seek agreement with Germany or, to be exact, to surrender to her. Quai d'Orsay gave no thought to any co-operation with the USSR in providing assistance for Czechoslovakia. In a conversation with Polish Ambassador, J. Lukasiiewicz, Bonnet declared that the Franco-Soviet pact

was very "vague" and that the French government "was not at all inclined to rely upon it". He personally "was no adherent of collaboration with Communism". Bonnet pointed out that he would be very pleased if, on making sure of expanding co-operation with Poland, he could "tell the Soviets that France does not need their assistance".¹⁰⁷

When the Czechoslovak Minister in France, S. Osusky, took up with Bonnet the question of military negotiations with the USSR, the reply he got was that "in view of successful co-operation between Britain and France, such negotiations are inopportune now".¹⁰⁸

A British government representative Lord Runciman arrived in Prague early in August as a "mediator" in the negotiations between the Czechoslovak government and the Sudeten German Nazis. From then on, the British and French pressure on Czechoslovakia was intensified. As Assistant Foreign Secretary Oliver Harvey pointed out, "Runciman is being brought into action to help the Government in the dirty work."¹⁰⁹

Naturally, the British government could not expect Runciman to settle the conflict. But it presumed that at a crucial moment he could have prepared some proposals which the British government would have backed and which could have been acceptable to Germany. In that case they would have been offered to Czechoslovakia as a "constructive" solution. Should the Czechoslovak government have refused to accept those proposals, the full blame would have been laid on it and there would have been the excuse for Britain and France to forswear assistance to Czechoslovakia.¹¹⁰

American Ambassador in Berlin Hugh Wilson arrived in Prague almost simultaneously with Lord Runciman. His pronouncements in Prague boiled down essentially to the idea that the Czechs could hope for their relations with Germany to be normalised only if Czechoslovakia renounced her pact with the USSR.¹¹¹ In that way U.S. diplomacy backed up the London plans.

British and French diplomacy was bringing intensified pressure on the government of Czechoslovakia in an effort to get it to meet the Nazi demand about the Sudetenland. The London and Paris "appeasers" went out of their way to compel Czechoslovakia "to commit suicide in order to forestall murder".¹¹²

Reporting the comments by the Czechoslovak Minister in

London, Masaryk, Maisky communicated to Moscow that "the British government had been pressurising Czechoslovakia in every way persuading her to make maximum concessions to the Sudeten Germans. Halifax summoned Masaryk to his office almost every week and advised him, called his attention, pointed out to him, warned him, and even threatened him, demanding more and more concessions" to the Czechoslovak Germans.¹¹³

The blow that France, Czechoslovakia's ally struck at her was still more telling. On July 20, Bonnet told Czechoslovak Minister Osuský that "France would not go to war for the Sudeten affair. . . In no case should the Czechoslovak government believe that if war breaks out we will be at its side". That was the first time the French government unequivocally warned the Czechoslovaks that it did not propose to honour its allied commitments.¹¹⁴

Soviet Proposals Ignored

Considering the policy of Britain and France to be extremely dangerous to the cause of peace in Europe, the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs said in its message to Soviet diplomatic representatives in Prague, Berlin, London and Paris on August 11, 1938: "We are extremely interested in the independence of Czechoslovakia being preserved and Hitler's thrust southeast being checked." However, the Western powers "do not find it necessary to seek our co-operation, are ignoring us and deciding among themselves whatever issues arise from the German-Czechoslovak conflict."¹¹⁵

Under instruction from the Soviet government, Ambassador Maisky in London said in a statement to British Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax in August 1938 that "the USSR is increasingly disappointed about the policy of Britain and France" and considered it to be "weak and short-sighted", capable of doing no more than encouraging the aggressor to make his further "loaps". Thus, he said, the Western powers were "assuming the responsibility for another world war being brought nearer and launched". The policy of Britain and France was described by the Soviet Ambassador as an attempt at "checking the victim of the aggression, rather than the aggressor himself". In Prague,

British and French representatives, he said, "are speaking so loud that the Czechs see it, not without reason, as manifest unfairness, while in Berlin they are speaking so softly that Hitler is ignoring all their overtures. We cannot have any sympathy for such a policy and we believe that the fate of Czechoslovakia depends, first and foremost, on whether or not Britain and France prove capable of taking up a firm stand against the aggressor in this crucial hour."¹¹⁶

Unlike the Western powers, the Soviet Union was ready to fulfil its obligations under its treaty with Czechoslovakia. Maisky told the Czechoslovak Minister in London, on August 16, that if Czechoslovakia was attacked the USSR "will fulfil her treaty obligations."¹¹⁷ A similar statement was made by the Soviet Ambassador to Lord Halifax on August 17.¹¹⁸ On the same day, the Ambassador met the U.S. Chargé d'Affaires in Britain, Johnson. After reaffirming the Soviet government's readiness to fulfil its commitments under the treaty, the Ambassador pointed out that Czechoslovakia was the major factor behind the situation in Central Europe. Therefore, "Hitler should not be allowed to destroy Czechoslovakia and that the time to prevent that destruction was now."¹¹⁹

As Zdeněk Fierlinger reported to Prague, the British Ambassador in Moscow, Lord Chilton, informed him that he had once more found out what sort of action the USSR would take in the event of a conflict and received a "very positive reply that the USSR will fulfil its treaty obligations".¹²⁰

The French Chargé d'Affaires in the USSR, J. Payart, referring to a conversation with Deputy People's Commissar Potemkin to the danger of an armed conflict, asked him, on September 1, 1938, what the Soviet position would be in case of a German attack on Czechoslovakia. In putting that question, he stressed that Poland and Romania were not willing to let Soviet troops pass through their territory.¹²¹ Informing the Soviet Ambassador in Prague about that conversation, Potemkin pointed out that what had attracted his particular attention was the special accent Bonnet made on the difficulties which Soviet military aid through the territory of Poland and Romania would have run into. In all probability, Bonnet, by underscoring those difficulties, wanted to get such an answer from the USSR

as the French government could use "as an excuse for its own refusal to assist Czechoslovakia".¹²²

On September 2, 1938, Payart officially raised the question of the Soviet stand with Litvinov. In that connection, the Soviet People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs remarked that "France is under obligation to help Czechoslovakia regardless of our assistance, whereas our assistance is conditional on French aid, for that reason, we have a greater right to show interest in assistance from France".

Replying afterwards to a question from the French representative, the People's Commissar declared: "Provided French aid will be forthcoming, we are determined to fulfil all our obligations under the Soviet-Czechoslovak pact, using all avenues open to us for this purpose." "So far as specifying aid is concerned," the People's Commissar went on to say, "we consider that a conference of representatives of the Soviet, French and Czechoslovak armies must be called to do it."

The People's Commissar went on to stress the need for "using all the means available to avert an armed clash". He recalled that right after the Anschluss of Austria, the USSR recommended a conference of representatives of the nations interested in maintaining peace to be called. "We believe that such a conference, with the participation of Britain, France and the USSR, at the present moment, and the adoption of a general declaration ... have more chances to deter Hitler from a war adventure than any other measure."¹²³

Referring to the above-mentioned "difficulties", Fierlinger asked the People's Commissar whether the USSR could give a guarantee of territorial inviolability in case of Soviet troops passing through the territory of Poland and Romania. The Soviet People's Commissar replied that "this goes without saying".¹²⁴

The situation in Europe was growing more menacing day by day. On September 3, 1938, the Nazis decided to get their forces ready for action by September 28.¹²⁵ Three days later, the British government received relevant information.¹²⁶

With a new crisis fast brewing, Chamberlain held the conferences of his "inner group" on September 8 and 9, and a full Cabinet meeting on September 12 to consider the worsening situation. However, at none of those confer-

ences and meetings were the Soviet proposals so much as mentioned. British historian Middlemas pointed out that they were ignored by the British Cabinet.¹²⁷

Having arrived in Geneva on September 11 for the Assembly of the League of Nations the British Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, R. A. Butler, told Bonnet that the British government would not, probably, agree to a joint Anglo-Franco-Soviet gesture.¹²⁸ When the Soviet People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs met Bonnet on the same day, the latter limited himself to stating that he had passed the Soviet proposals to the British, but they declined them. Bonnet did not even make any reference to the position of the French government itself. "Bonnet shrugged it off—nothing doing," the People's Commissar reported to Moscow.¹²⁹

So the Soviet proposals of September 2 were not seconded by the governments of Britain and France. Yet, to have carried out those proposals, providing for political and—if need be—for military measures, could have played an important part in forestalling aggression and strengthening the peace. That did not mean, however, that the ruling circles of Britain and France were not deeply worried both by the balance of forces and, to no small extent, by class considerations. For a German invasion of Czechoslovakia could have sparked off a war between the capitalist nations of Europe, and their own hopes for using Nazi Germany as a strike force to fight the USSR would have been dashed. Along with that, the reactionary forces of the Western powers were fearful of such a war generating revolutionary upheavals in the German-occupied countries involved.

Things reached a point where French government spokesmen began appealing to the Nazis to take into account common class interests, before anything else. For example, the French Premier Daladier emphasised during his meeting with the German Chargé d'Affaires, on September 7: "After the end of a war, the outbreak of a revolution, irrespective of victors or vanquished, was as certain in France as in Germany and Italy."¹³⁰

British journalist and historian Leonard Mosley has pointed out with good reason that the French ruling circles were panic-stricken in fear of the menace of Nazi Germany, although the French Army was stronger than the German. "In France this clique [ruling]," he wrote, "was riddled with

corruption and defeatism; hagridden by the menace of Nazi Germany from outside their borders and by the threat of domestic Communism within, many of them were increasingly ready to make an accommodation with Germany in the hope that accord with National Socialism would throttle the threat of Red revolution."¹³¹

It would be wrong to believe that Paris underestimated the gravity of the German danger and the significance of Czechoslovakia as a military factor. This is what one can gather from the Memorandum of September 9, 1938, by the Chief of the French General Staff, General Gamelin. The Czechoslovak state, he wrote, is of certain interest, from the French point of view, in the event of military operations in Europe. By its very geographic position, Czechoslovakia is an obstacle in the way of German expansionist plans against the East. Besides, the Czechoslovak Army is strong enough to pin down a large proportion of German forces, thus draining them off from the Western Front. Czechoslovakia has 17 infantry divisions—this number could be swiftly doubled, and 4 motorised divisions. Finally, Czechoslovakia has some airfields to threaten Germany, especially if she got some air force reinforcements. For Germany to occupy Czechoslovakia would mean appreciably expanding the German military potential (with Skoda factories, etc.); helping Germany take possession of the national wealth of Hungary and Romania; and giving her an outlet to the Black Sea ports.¹³² Yet, all these considerations notwithstanding, the French government was prepared to sacrifice Czechoslovakia to the Nazis.

It was not by the national interests either, but by their narrow class interests that the British ruling circles, too, guided themselves. Of course, none of their spokesmen ever revealed that in public, but some touched on that problem now and again, for example, in their diaries. British politician Harold Nicolson made the following entry in his diary on September 11, after his conversation with a Cabinet member, Oliver Stanley. "Oliver agrees that the conflict has really nothing to do with Czechoslovakia... At the same time any reference to Russian assistance makes him wince, and at one moment he sighed deeply and said, 'You see, whether we win or lose, it will be the end of everything we stand for'. By 'we' he means obviously the capitalist classes."¹³³ A similar entry could be found somewhat later

in the diary of Assistant Foreign Secretary Oliver Harvey: "Any war, whether we win or not, would destroy the rich idle classes and they are for peace at any price."¹³⁴

MUNICH SELLOUT

Chamberlain's Visit to Berchtesgaden

The British ruling establishment was increasingly inclined to surrender the Sudetenland to Hitler Germany in the hope of reaching an accommodation between the British Empire and the Nazi Reich in that way. The *Times* of London openly suggested in a leading article on September 7 that the Czechoslovak government ought to think of turning the Sudetenland over to Germany.

A Conservative Party leader, Henry Channon, pointed out in his diary that the *Times* article had been produced in agreement between Halifax and the *Times* publisher, Geoffrey Dawson, and was definitely a "ballon d'essai" to see how the public would react, and to prepare them for the Runciman Report containing similar proposals.¹³⁵ Halifax said on September 11, 1938, that the annexation of the Sudetenland by Germany was the only hope to avoid war. He considered it desirable for a conference of four powers—Britain, France, Germany and Italy—to be called to settle the matter.¹³⁶

The prospect of calling such a conference was discussed on the same day by the British Ambassador in Paris, Phipps, with the Secretary-General of the French Foreign Ministry, Alexis Leger. The French diplomat expressed his full agreement with the idea of calling such a conference, stressing that there was no point in the Soviet Union being invited to attend.¹³⁷ On September 13, the decision that this international conference was well worth-while was taken at a French Cabinet meeting. The news was immediately communicated to London. Bonnet considered that the object of the conference must be to decide on the transfer of the Sudetenland to Germany and that it should be attended by the four Western powers.¹³⁸ That was the final abandonment of the struggle against aggression and of the allied

treaties with the USSR and Czechoslovakia by the government of Daladier-Bonnet, and their surrender to the Nazi Reich.¹³⁹

A conference of the British Premier with his "inner group", called on Chamberlain's initiative on September 13, with the international situation further strained because of acts of provocation by fascist agents throughout the Sudetenland, decided on the Premier making an urgent trip to Germany.¹⁴⁰ On the same day, the British Premier sent a letter to King George VI to inform him that the object of his journey would be "the establishment of an Anglo-German understanding" and the settlement of the Czechoslovak question. He emphasised that his intention was to sketch out to Hitler "the prospect of Germany and England as the two pillars of European peace and buttresses against Communism".¹⁴¹

It was realised in Berlin, quite naturally, that the only thing Chamberlain's visit could mean under the circumstances was Britain's willingness to make serious concessions. Besides, the Nazis had succeeded in deciphering some foreign codes and were informed of the negotiations between London and Paris, on the one hand, and Prague on the other. For that reason, the Sudeten Germans came into the open (naturally, on instructions from Hitler) to demand the annexation of the Sudetenland to Germany, while Hitler was just "playing" with Chamberlain.¹⁴²

H. Chamberlain, accompanied by H. Wilson and W. Strang, arrived in Berchtesgaden on September 15. The British Premier opened his conversations with Hitler by declaring his desire for an Anglo-German rapprochement and for an exchange of general views on the policies of both countries. Hitler, however, demonstrated a manifest reluctance to discuss problems of that kind at all. He reduced the entire negotiating process to a consideration of one particular question that was of interest to him. Being aware of Chamberlain's position, Hitler emphatically demanded that the Sudetenland should be turned over to Germany, threatening a world war otherwise. Besides, he demanded the abrogation of Czechoslovakia's treaties of mutual assistance with other countries. Chamberlain accepted these demands, but said he had yet to get the official sanction of his government, and talk the matter over with the French government.¹⁴³

The Berchtesgaden rendezvous gave Hitler an opportunity to draw the conclusion that there was no reason for him to fear any British opposition to his plans for the takeover of the Sudetenland. Moreover, shortly after that meeting the German Foreign Ministry representative at Hitler's headquarters, Howel, received information that "Hitler is further planning the capture of all Czechoslovakia. He is now quite sure that this objective can be achieved without any intervention by the British government."¹⁴⁴

After informing Lord Halifax, Simon and Hoare about his talks with Hitler, Chamberlain said he thought Hitler's demand for the annexation of the Sudetenland to Germany could be met. He stressed as the only important point that this had to be done "in an orderly manner", that is, so as not to provoke an armed conflict. Chamberlain expressed the confidence that the settlement of the Sudeten question would open the way to Anglo-German understanding.¹⁴⁵

It is the summit conference between Britain and France in London on September 18 that decided in favour of Hitler's demand for the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia. That embarrassed even some representatives of the British ruling establishment. "One of the extraordinary things to me is how we, with calculated cynicism, sign away the liberty of 9,000,000 people,"¹⁴⁶ said General Ironside in his *Diaries*. The French Chargé d'Affaires in London, R. Cambon, admitted that the decisions taken by the British and the French were "the most painful possible experience for his government for many years."¹⁴⁷

On the following day, the British and French accomplices of the Nazi aggressors handed the Czechoslovak government their notes which amounted to a joint ultimatum from Germany, Britain and France demanding that the Sudeten region should be turned over to the Reich. At the same time, the British and French governments urged Czechoslovakia to agree to her treaties of mutual assistance with other nations being replaced by a common guarantee against unprovoked aggression, expressing their willingness to share in giving such a guarantee.¹⁴⁸

President Roosevelt, having invited the British Ambassador for a top secret conversation on September 20, could not but admit that Britain and France wanted Czechoslovakia to make "the most terrible remorseless sacrifice that had ever been demanded of a state". At the same time Roo-

sevelt declared that if the policy the British had embarked on proved successful, "he would be the first to cheer".¹⁴⁹ When, however, the Czechoslovak Chargé d'Affaires asked the U.S. government on the same day to publish any statement whatsoever in support of Czechoslovakia, the request was left unheeded.¹⁵⁰

The USSR Ready to Resist Aggression

The position of the USSR was entirely different. On September 19, 1938, the Czechoslovak government asked the Soviet government to reply as soon as possible to these questions: a) will the USSR, in conformity with the Treaty, afford prompt and effective assistance if France remained loyal and afforded assistance as well?; b) will the USSR help Czechoslovakia as a member of the League of Nations?¹⁵¹

The following instructions were given to the Soviet Ambassador in Prague on September 20:

"1. You may give an affirmative answer on behalf of the Government of the Soviet Union to the question from Beneš as to whether the USSR will render prompt and effective assistance if France remains loyal to her and affords assistance as well.

2. You may give a similar affirmative answer to the other question, too. . . ."¹⁵²

The Soviet Ambassador in Prague, Alexandrovsky, immediately passed this reply to the Czechoslovak government. France was informed about it as well. So in those difficult and dangerous conditions for Czechoslovakia, the Soviet government once more officially reaffirmed that the USSR would fulfil its obligations under the pact providing for assistance to her in the event of an attack by Germany. In accordance with this decision, Litvinov, speaking before the Assembly of the League of Nations on September 21, 1938, restated the Soviet government's position on resistance to aggression. He stressed that measures outlined by the Covenant of the League of Nations had to be taken against the aggressor resolutely, consistently and without hesitation, and in that case the aggressor would not be tempted and "peace will be preserved by peaceful means". Litvinov, in his speech, exposed the disgraceful policy of

abetting aggression, to the extent of getting "directives and ultimatums at the cost of the vital interests of any particular state". The head of the Soviet delegation read out the statements which the Soviet government had passed to the government of France on September 2 and to that of Czechoslovakia on September 20.

However, London and Paris were still deaf to the Soviet proposals. How absurd that was has been most strikingly shown in the memoirs of Winston Churchill. "The Soviet offer was in effect ignored," he wrote. "... They were treated with an indifference—not to say disdain... Events took their course as if Soviet Russia did not exist. For this we afterwards paid dearly."¹⁵³

In fulfilment of the emergency instructions of their respective governments, the British and French Ministers in Czechoslovakia emphatically declared to the Czechoslovak government in the night of September 21 that should it fail to accept the Anglo-French proposals, the French government "will not honour its treaty" with Czechoslovakia. "If the Czechs join forces with the Russians," they emphasised, "the war can become a crusade against the Bolsheviks. Then, it will be very difficult for the governments of England and France to stay out."¹⁵⁴

Submitting to Anglo-French pressure, the Czechoslovak government gave up by consenting to Hitler's Berchtesgaden demands.

Litvinov repeatedly confirmed the Soviet readiness to afford assistance to Czechoslovakia also in his conversations with foreign diplomats and politicians.

For example, Litvinov conferred in Geneva with Lord Privy Seal de la Warr and Deputy Foreign Secretary Butler in the Assembly of the League of Nations in Geneva.

Butler cabled to the Foreign Office quoting Litvinov as having said that "if French came to the assistance of the Czechs Russians would take action". He said that "he had for long been hoping for conversations between Great Britain, France and Russia, and he would like to suggest to us in this informal conversation that a meeting of the three Powers mentioned, together with Romania and any other small Power... should take place preferably in Paris, and so show Germans that we mean business."¹⁵⁵

Chamberlain was almost horrified by the comments of the People's Commissar in his conversation with de la Warr

and Butler. He saw them as a "great danger" (!?) since to follow them through would have meant, in his opinion, "to strengthen Bolshevism in the whole world".¹⁵⁶

For the next few days the British government was almost continuously in session to consider the increasingly involved situation, but Chamberlain and Halifax did not even mention Litvinov's proposal, thus withholding it from the Cabinet members. De la Warr, who attended all these sittings, also kept silent.

Although the Soviet government was not in a position to know about Chamberlain's reaction to the People's Commissar's offer, it gave a perfectly correct assessment of the situation as it had shaped up and of the possible prospect ahead. On September 23, the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, in reply to the report from the People's Commissar about his conversation with de la Warr and Butler, wrote it was doubtful that France and Britain could agree to a conference with Soviet involvement because they had so far been ignoring the Soviet Union.¹⁵⁷

Even many Western politicians and historians had to admit that the Soviet stand on assistance to Czechoslovakia was impeccable. For instance, a prominent British Conservative Party leader L. S. Amery pointed out that "Russia's attitude throughout the crisis was perfectly clear". The Soviet Union, he wrote, "consistently backed the conception of collective security."¹⁵⁸ American historian Arthur H. Farnia also admitted in his study *The Diplomacy of Appeasement* that unlike Britain and France, "the Soviet Union actually showed a... willingness to render military assistance to Czechoslovakia."¹⁵⁹

The Soviet government held an adamant and determined position also because Polish aggressors were acting hand in glove with those of Hitler Germany against Czechoslovakia.

Back on April 17, 1938, Stomonyakov stated that "Poland is coming into the open as an actual party to the aggressor bloc. In a hurry not to be too late she presented her ultimatum to Lithuania right after the Anschluß and enforced the establishment of diplomatic and all other relations with Lithuania which she... regards as nothing but the beginning of her gradual colonisation of Lithuania. Poland is playing an active role in the German plans to resolve the Czechoslovak question. She is openly stirring up the Teszin question... Poland, as is now obvious to every-

body, is closely bound up with Germany and will go on following in her footsteps." ¹⁶⁰

On May 25, 1938, Daladier informed the Soviet Ambassador in Paris, Surits, that his sounding of Poland's position in the event of German aggression against Czechoslovakia had produced the most negative result possible. Not only was there no reason to count on support from Poland, Daladier said, but "there is none to feel sure that Poland will not strike in the back." ¹⁶¹

J. Beck informed the Polish Ambassador in Berlin, Lipski, on September 19, 1938, that within two days Poland would have considerable forces brought up to the Czechoslovak border, and that he was prepared to contact Hitler or Göring personally about co-ordinating the action by Germany and Poland against Czechoslovakia. ¹⁶² On the following day Lipski said as much to Hitler, stressing that Poland "would not shrink from resorting to force" to have her demand met. Hitler assured Lipski that in that case the Third Reich would take Poland's side. ¹⁶³

On September 21, the Polish rulers presented an ultimatum to the Czechoslovak government demanding that some areas of Czechoslovakia should be turned over to Poland, and also denounced the 1925 Polish-Czechoslovak arbitration treaty. ¹⁶⁴ In the meantime, Polish forces continued to be massed close to the Czechoslovak border. The Polish military attaché in Paris informed the French General Staff that if German troops should attack Czechoslovakia, Polish troops at once would seize the whole of Slovakia which would then be split between Poland and Hungary. ¹⁶⁵

On September 22, the Czechoslovak government, reporting the immediate danger of an attack from Poland, turned to the USSR for support. In response, the Soviet government passed a statement to the Polish government on the very next day to the effect that if Polish troops invaded Czechoslovakia, the USSR would consider that to be an act of aggression and would denounce her treaty of non-aggression with Poland. ¹⁶⁶ The Czechoslovak Minister in Moscow, Fierlinger, was immediately informed of that statement. ¹⁶⁷ That is to say, the Soviet Union once more confirmed its resolute stand in defence of Czechoslovakia.

Referring to the policy of the Soviet Union, British historian John Wheeler-Bennett wrote: "She took every opportunity to prove her willingness to fulfil her obligations to

France and to Czechoslovakia: again and again this was emphasised in London, in Paris, in Prague, in Geneva and also in Berlin, to the acute embarrassment of the British and French governments. According to all available evidence, the conduct of Russia was exemplary throughout the Czech crisis. She even went beyond the letter of her bond, threatening to denounce her non-aggression treaty with Poland, if that state joined in an attack on Czechoslovakia." ¹⁶⁸

All that was taking place at a time when the situation was most dangerous for the Soviet Union itself since the Polish government was harbouring the idea of a joint crusade by German and Polish forces against the USSR. The Polish Ambassador in Paris, Lukaszewicz, told Bullitt on September 25 that "a war of religion between fascism and Bolshevism was about to begin" and that in the event of the Soviet Union lending assistance to Czechoslovakia, Poland was prepared to go to war against the USSR shoulder to shoulder with Germany. The Polish government was confident, Lukaszewicz declared, that "within three months the Russian Armies would be in complete rout and Russia would no longer preserve even the semblance of a state". ¹⁶⁹

Romania, too, took up a stand to favour the aggressors. Informing the Italian government about Romania's position, the Romanian Minister in Rome, Zamfirescu, told the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Italy, Ciano, that Romania had objected, continued to object and would be objecting to Soviet troops passing through her territory to render assistance to Czechoslovakia. As regards the deterioration of relations between Poland and the USSR over Czechoslovakia, the Romanian Minister said that "Romania would side with Warsaw and in any event the alliance with Poland would take precedence over any pledge to Prague." ¹⁷⁰ That meant that in case of an armed conflict breaking out because of the German and Polish aggression against Czechoslovakia, with the Soviet Union involved, Romania could, in spite of her alliance with Czechoslovakia, side with the aggressors. ¹⁷¹

Japan also kept up a threatening posture with respect to the USSR. On September 26 Göring informed the British Ambassador in Berlin, Henderson, that in the event of a German-Soviet conflict, Japan had pledged herself to attack the USSR. ¹⁷² The Soviet embassy in Japan also communicated to the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs on

September 21 that Japanese newspapers went altogether along with the Nazis over the Czechoslovak question. Some were calling for the Anti-Comintern Pact to be transformed into a military agreement of Germany, Italy and Japan.¹⁷³

Yet all that notwithstanding, the Soviet Union was still prepared to fulfil its treaty obligations to Czechoslovakia. The necessary military measures in preparation for such a contingency had been taken well in advance.

On September 21, some Soviet military units were put on the alert in the face of a sharply exacerbated crisis. At the same time, other measures were taken to reinforce the units stationed in the western borderland military districts and enhance their combat preparedness. Altogether, the units on the alert comprised 1 armoured corps, 30 infantry divisions, 10 cavalry divisions, 7 armoured brigades, 1 motorised infantry brigade and 12 air brigades, etc. 548 combat aircraft were on hand to be flown to Czechoslovakia.¹⁷⁴

On September 25, 1938, the People's Commissariat of Defence instructed the Soviet Air Attaché in France, Vasilchenko, to communicate the following to the Chief of the French General Staff, General Gamelin:

"Our Command has so far taken the following preliminary measures:

1. 30 infantry divisions have been moved into areas in the direct proximity of the western border. So have cavalry divisions.

2. The units concerned have been adequately reinforced with reservists.

3. Our technical forces—Air Force and armoured units are in full fighting trim."¹⁷⁵

This information was passed to the French General Staff on the following day. It was also communicated to the British government in the course of the Anglo-French negotiations then in progress.

A further 17 infantry divisions, 22 armoured and 3 motorised infantry brigades were put on the alert in the closing days of September. A total of up to 330,000 men had been called up for service in the Soviet Armed Forces additionally.¹⁷⁶

The facts just cited indicate that the position of all the major parties involved in the events under review became quite clear. The Nazi aggressors were acting with increas-

ing impudence day by day. The Polish ruling circles acted in alliance with them. The position of Britain and France, on the other hand, was increasingly defeatist. Not only did they refuse all support for Czechoslovakia, but, on the contrary, they were helping the Nazi Reich annex the Sudetenland and did it so as not to provoke a general war in Europe involving the Western powers as well. It was the Soviet Union alone which stuck to its firm and consistent position and emphatically declared its readiness to fulfil its obligations under the treaty with Czechoslovakia and lend her effective assistance.

Hitler Mocks His "Appeasers"

On September 22, Chamberlain, in company of Wilson and Strang arrived in Bad-Godesberg, for yet another meeting with Hitler. The British Premier, with a satisfied air, informed Hitler that he had succeeded in obtaining the consent for the transfer of the Sudetenland to Germany not only from the British government, but from the French and Czechoslovak governments as well.

Hitler decided, however, to harden his demand so as to take one more step forward towards the liquidation of the Czechoslovak state.¹⁷⁷ Quite unexpectedly for Chamberlain, Hitler struck a blow at him that he had prepared well in advance. He mockingly uttered: "I am very sorry but now this is no longer enough for us". In a take-it-or-leave-it tone, he demanded that the transfer of the Sudetenland to Germany should be started at once, that is, on September 26, and finished by September 28.¹⁷⁸ At the same time, he now strongly insisted on some areas of Czechoslovakia being turned over to Poland and Hungary. Finally, he declared that there were no more conditions for the existence of the Czechoslovak state. Should his demands be declined, Hitler threatened, there would be war.¹⁷⁹

In his report on this visit to Bad-Godesberg, Chamberlain had to admit at a British Cabinet meeting that Hitler's latest demands had been a "considerable shock to him".¹⁸⁰ In spite of the increasingly brazen demands from the Nazis, the British Premier never gave up his attempts at reaching agreement with them on the annexation of the Sudetenland by Germany being carried out "in an orderly

manner" so as not to spark off a war. As he was about to leave Bad-Godesberg, Chamberlain assured Hitler that he would do everything possible to have his demands complied with.¹⁸¹

Projected Conference of Aggressors and Their Patrons

Britain and France once more considered calling a conference of the Western powers and the Nazi Reich to decide on the "peaceful transfer" of the Sudetenland to Germany, that is, on the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia. Bonnet declared at a French government meeting on September 27 that agreement with Germany had to be sought "at any cost".

On September 28, Chamberlain informed Hitler that he was prepared to come to Germany for the third time to discuss the terms of the transfer of the Sudetenland to Germany. He pointed out that if the Chancellor so wished, representatives of France and Italy could likewise take part in the negotiations. At the same time, the British Premier expressed his conviction, that is to say, he was actually assuring Hitler, that in this way the Nazi Reich could get its demands met forthwith without war.¹⁸² The U.S. President, on receiving a telegram from the U.S. Ambassador in London, Kennedy, about Chamberlain's proposal, sent the following message to the British Premier on September 28: "Good man!". Kennedy, on his part, told Halifax that he was "entirely in sympathy with, and a warm admirer of everything" Chamberlain was doing.¹⁸³ So Britain and the U.S. were acting in full harmony.

Following agreement to call a conference of the four powers—Britain, France, Germany and Italy—Halifax informed about this the Czechoslovak Minister in London who, naturally, could not conceal a feeling of surprise.

"But this is a conference to discuss the fate of my country? . . . Are we not being invited to take part?"

"This is a conference of the Great Powers only."

"Then I take it that the Soviet Union is also being invited. After all, Russia has a treaty with my country, too."

"We had no time to invite the Russians," the British Lord cut off with irritation.¹⁸⁴

Winston Churchill gave a very striking description of the

position of the USSR and Britain in talking with the Soviet Ambassador in London on September 29. "Today Churchill, in a conversation with me," Maisky wrote, "spoke with great respect and satisfaction of the conduct of the USSR in the present crisis. In particular, he put a very high value on Litvinov's speech in the Assembly, and on your Note to Poland. The USSR, Churchill said, is doing its international duty, while Britain and France are surrendering to the aggressors. For this reason, the sympathy towards the USSR is fast rising. . ." As to the position of the British government, Churchill criticised it in very strong terms, pointing out that it was leading to the inevitable outbreak of war. Chamberlain's resolve to "ignore and push away" the USSR, according to Churchill, was "not only absurd but criminal", and the Anglo-French plan for the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia was outrageous.¹⁸⁵

The West German historian Niedhardt, who had thoroughly studied British Public Record Office documents about the Chamberlain government's policy towards the USSR, stated that it was "downright ignoring and isolation of the Soviet Union".¹⁸⁶

The Munich Deal

The conference of Britain, France, Germany and Italy was held in Munich on September 29 and 30. It ended with the alienation of a large strip of Czechoslovak territory all along the German-Czechoslovak border and its incorporation in the Reich.

Chamberlain and Daladier arrived in Munich, well prepared to surrender. They did not even try to oppose the demands made by Hitler (technically, these had been presented by Mussolini). On the contrary, Chamberlain and Daladier tried hard to outdo each other in paying compliments about something like a generosity of that offer. Hitler boasted later on that Czechoslovakia had been offered to him in Munich on a platter by her friends.¹⁸⁷

The representatives of Czechoslovakia were told about the outcome of the Munich deal by the Four Powers as something like a verdict not subject to appeal. The first announcement was made by Horace Wilson even before the

conference was over. On entering the "waiting room", where Czechoslovak representatives, summoned to Munich, had spent hours waiting for this verdict in excitement, he decided to make them happy:

"It is almost over. You will be glad to know that we have reached agreement on practically everything."

"And what is to be our fate?"

"It is not as bad as it might have been."

And Wilson pointed to a strip on the map painted with red ink covering almost half the territory of Czechoslovakia, from the North, West and South, and including almost the whole of the country's defence line.

"But this is outrageous! It is cruel and it is criminally stupid!"

"I am sorry. It is no use arguing." ¹⁸⁸

That was how Chamberlain and Daladier struck a deal with the aggressors in Munich, shamelessly letting Czechoslovakia down and helping the fascist aggressors carve her up.

Naturally, the Four Powers did not have the slightest legal ground for arrogating the right to make any decision on that carve-up. Since the deal was a gross violation of the sovereign rights of the Czechoslovak state and was imposed on Czechoslovakia under threat of force, it was *illegal*.

Roosevelt sent a message of congratulation to Chamberlain through his Ambassador in London Kennedy. Although Kennedy had also totally supported the policy of connivance with German aggression, he did realise that it would eventually do its makers no honour. He showed a certain measure of caution, therefore. On receiving the cable, he read it out to Chamberlain at 10 Downing Street, instead of handing it to him. "I had a feeling that cable would haunt Roosevelt some day, so I kept it." ¹⁸⁹

With the Four-Power talks in Munich over, Chamberlain offered to confer with Hitler eye-to-eye. Hitler consented. The British Premier attached paramount importance to that chat. For he saw the Munich deal about the carve-up of Czechoslovakia more as a means to achieve his own ends than anything else. His object was an understanding between the British Empire and the Nazi Reich on all problems of interest to both sides so as to turn German aggression from West to East. Britain's ruling circles hoped that,

with Hitler's pressing demand on the Sudetenland gratified, the situation was most propitious for an effort to take the bull by the horns. ¹⁹⁰

In the course of that conversation with Hitler, Chamberlain gave a fairly transparent account of his own foreign policy programme. Finding it necessary to demonstrate his negative attitude to the USSR, the British Premier pointed out that Hitler did not have to fear any longer that Czechoslovakia would be used as a springboard for "Russian aggression". He went on to stress that neither did Hitler have to fear that Britain would pursue a policy of military and economic encirclement of Germany in Southeast Europe. What preoccupied him most was an improvement of Anglo-German relations. And he offered Hitler to sign an Anglo-German declaration of non-aggression in recompense for all that Britain had already done for the German aggressors and promised to do later on.

Hitler did not balk at it, and the declaration was signed there and then. That was, in point of fact, an agreement between Britain and Germany on non-aggression and consultations. The Nazi Chancellor found it possible somewhat to sugar the pill of the Munich sellout for the British Premier because it was very important for him to strengthen Chamberlain's hand. "You don't refuse a thirsty man a glass of lemonade," Mussolini remarked on the occasion. ¹⁹¹

By signing the declaration Nazi Germany did not mean to stick to it, however. On the contrary, right there in Munich the Nazis went on discussing with Mussolini the idea of a German-Italian-Japanese alliance to prepare for war against Britain and France. As the conference ended, Ribbentrop declared that Chamberlain "has today signed the death warrant of the British Empire and left it to us to fill in the date". ¹⁹²

What preoccupied the ruling circles of Britain and France most about the Munich deal was to make it as anti-Soviet as possible. This can be seen quite well from the earlier references to the British Cabinet debates on the major foreign policy issues. As much can be seen from some of the diplomatic documents of the United States, France, Germany, Italy, Poland and other countries at the time. On October 4, 1938, the French Ambassador in Moscow, Coulondre, pointed out that the Munich agreement "is particularly menacing to the Soviet Union". ¹⁹³ Lord Lothian, appointed as

British Ambassador to the United States shortly afterwards, said that because of Munich the political circles of London believed that Hitler, with Czechoslovakia captured, would march on the Ukraine. Everybody was waiting for that to happen, he emphasised.¹⁹⁴

The anti-Soviet lining of the Four-Power Munich deal has not been passed over by some Western historians either. British historian Wheeler-Bennett pointed out that at the time of Munich in the ruling circles of Britain "there was a secret hope that if the tide of German expansion could be turned eastward, it would dissipate its force on the steppes of Russia in a struggle which would exhaust both combatants".¹⁹⁵

The same was evidenced by a well-known American columnist Walter Lippmann. He wrote that Britain's Munich policy was rooted "in a last vain hope that Germany and Russia would fight and exhaust one another".¹⁹⁶

West German historian B. Celovsky admitted that throughout the pre-Munich period the Soviet government had tried to compel a change in the "appeasement policy" so as to create a united front against the aggressors. "Chamberlain and Bonnett did all they could to keep the Soviet Union out. For ideological reasons and for considerations prompted by power politics they were against co-operation with the Soviets". It was not "the principles of democracy and law, but anti-Bolshevism that the governments of France and Great Britain guided themselves by in their foreign policies."¹⁹⁷ Even Lord Halifax's biographer Birkenhead had to admit that it was extremely important to deal with the Soviet Union openly as an ally, and "it must be counted a glaring error that more realistic efforts were not made to secure this end".¹⁹⁸

The Soviet Union clearly saw the danger arising from the Munich deal of the four imperialist powers. The Soviet press pointed out that within a short space of time Ethiopia, Spain, China, Austria and Czechoslovakia had fallen victim to fascist invaders. Along with denouncing the aggressors' action, the press criticised the policy of abetting aggression, which was pursued in London and Paris, and which led to the Munich deal to carve up Czechoslovakia. "The surrender of the so-called democratic countries to the aggressor", *Izvestia* wrote, "having ostensibly put off the outbreak of war, is actually bringing it nearer."¹⁹⁹

In summing up the latest course of events, the Soviet head of government V. M. Molotov stated in his report on November 6 that "German imperialism has sliced off more of Czechoslovakia than it could itself have counted on. Some of the spoils went to Poland, as the ally of German fascism in the carve-up of Czechoslovakia." Only the Soviet Union, he said, has demonstrated its loyalty to the treaties and international commitments it had entered into, and its willingness to oppose aggression. "Only the Soviet Union, the socialist country, has unshakably stood and does stand for fighting fascist aggression and for defending peace, freedom and independence of the peoples from fascist attack."²⁰⁰

The Munich deal fundamentally changed the situation in Central Europe. Having captured Austria and then some of Czechoslovakia, Hitler Germany substantially strengthened her positions.

Czechoslovakia was sacrificed to the Nazis in Munich. She was forced into accepting an illegal decision whereby she lost much of her territory including economically most important areas, and a considerable proportion of her population. Because of the mixed population of the regions annexed to Germany, 1,161,616 Czechs and Slovaks found themselves under the rule of the Nazi Reich.²⁰¹ The newly-drawn frontiers cut and disrupted the country's major transport arteries. Czechoslovakia was deprived of her natural borders and frontier fortifications and found herself utterly defenceless in the face of the fascist aggressor.²⁰² Half a year later all this was exploited by the Nazi Reich for the complete liquidation of the Czechoslovak state.

The strategic and political positions of France and Britain also turned out to be greatly weakened because of the Munich deal. The Anglo-French hegemony in Europe, which rested on the Treaty of Versailles, was finally done away with. And so was, in point of fact, the system of military alliances France had concluded with other nations of Europe. The League of Nations was hurried. The Soviet-French Treaty of Mutual Assistance in action against aggression as a means to ensure peace and security in Europe was virtually invalidated. Nazi Germany got the best opportunities for continued expansionism, and, for aggression against Britain and France in particular. French Ambassador in Warsaw Leon Noël admitted in his recollections that "the Munich accords and the betrayal of Czechoslova-

kia arising therefrom represent one of the most pitiful, shameful and humiliating episodes of the policy conducted in the name of France during the period between the two world wars, which led to the most destructive catastrophe in our history."²⁰³

The Munich deal brought nearer the outbreak of the Second World War.

"APPEASEMENT" POLICY GOING BANKRUPT

Will the Nazis March on the Ukraine?

The reactionary ruling circles of Britain and France expected that following the Munich sellout, Germany's aggressive ambitions would be turned eastwards, ultimately against the Soviet Union.

The Soviet Union did, in fact, find itself in a very precarious position. By the joint efforts of Chamberlain, Daladier, Hitler and Mussolini, the USSR had virtually been forced into a state of total international isolation. The governments of Britain and France, hoping to push Germany into a war against the Soviet Union, stressed openly that they wanted no trucks with the USSR. After Munich, the Foreign Office cut off all contact with the Soviet embassy in London. Britain seriously considered breaking off her trade treaty with the Soviet Union. French Foreign Minister Bonnet intended to denounce the treaties of mutual assistance with the USSR and Poland.²⁰⁴

French Ambassador Coulondre and British Ambassador Chilston were recalled from Moscow in October 1938 and November 1938 respectively, whereupon the French and British embassies in Moscow were in charge of *Chargés d'Affaires* for several months.

As the Soviet Embassy in London pointed out, political circles in Britain as well as the press set about discussing, right after Munich, the prospect of Hitler "going eastwards and having the Ukraine as his primary major target". There is no doubt, the Soviet embassy pointed out, that a whole series of influential personalities (including some members of the Cabinet) "directly intimated to Hitler about this

eastern venture, promising at least, favourable neutrality to him..."²⁰⁵ The *British News Chronicle* said that the "die-hards" were seeking to make Russia and Germany take one another by the throat.

British historian Middlemas, who thoroughly studied the declassified documents of the British government referring to the prewar years, had to admit that there was "evidence ... to justify the Soviet charge that Britain planned to set Germany at war with Russia".²⁰⁶

The Soviet Ambassador to France, Surits, who held similar views, reported in a dispatch to Moscow on November 11, that the French ruling top leadership was "particularly enthusiastic about the *Drang nach Osten* version implying that Germany is to be given a free hand in the East. That, in the long run, naturally, meant giving her a free hand for action against the USSR".²⁰⁷

The U.S. Ambassador in Paris, Bullitt, referring to the post-Munich policies of Britain and France, said that they would like it to come to war in the East between the German Reich and Russia, a long and extenuating war between them. In that case, the Western Powers "could attack Germany and get her to surrender".²⁰⁸

When a Franco-German declaration on non-aggression was signed on December 6, 1938, as a result of the visit to Paris by Germany's Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop, Daladier and Bonnet became even more confident that the aggressor's avid eyes would from now on be turned only eastwards. Back in Berlin, Ribbentrop was able to declare, with reference to the Soviet-French Treaty of Mutual Assistance, that the declaration signed in Paris finally "detached France from the USSR and prevents any last traces of risk of Russo-French collaboration."²⁰⁹

Having concluded this agreement with Germany, the French ruling circles went into raptures. Bonnet wrote, informing the French ambassadors about his talks with Ribbentrop, that "German policy is now more concerned with fighting Bolshevism. The Reich shows her will for expansion to the East".²¹⁰

To pay the ransom and push Germany into a "crusade" against the USSR, the British and French ruling quarters were prepared to leave all the nations of Eastern Europe at the mercy of German Nazis. The allied treaty with Poland, co-operation with the Little Entente and the Franco-

Soviet pact, Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs Potemkin pointed out as he conferred with the French Ambassador to the USSR Naggiar, on February 9, 1939, were "recognised already at the past stages of the foreign policy of France, something like an asset of history".²¹¹ The Foreign Office also had information that France proposed to get rid of her commitments under the treaties with Poland, and, above all, with the USSR.²¹² Such a course of the French and British ruling circles after Munich was still prompted by their hatred of communism whether in the shape of the Soviet state or in that of the revolutionary movement in their own countries. "England has groveled on its belly before Hitler because it is afraid of communism,"²¹³ U.S. Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes pointed out in his *Secret Diary*. The British government even suggested Anglo-German military co-operation in the struggle against the Soviet Union.²¹⁴

The Munich dealers were hacked up in every way by the most reactionary representatives of the U.S. ruling establishment. As a former U.S. President Hoover argued in his speech on October 26, 1938, the West European nations should not have to fear Germany because the opportunities of the dictatorships lie in expansion eastward; so such expansion should not be interfered with.²¹⁵ The Soviet embassy in the United States noted in this connection that the reactionary sections of the Republican Party were still "dreaming of a closer relationship with fascist countries and nurturing the illusion and the hope that the European aggressors will act against us".²¹⁶ From as early as the summer of 1938, the United States was represented by no more than a Chargé d'Affaires in Moscow, and Washington was in no hurry to appoint a new ambassador.

The British, French and American reaction in every way egged on the German, Japanese and other aggressors. The Western press carried no end of reports about the "weakness" of the Soviet Union in the military as well as economic respects.

Information was obtained in London to the effect that Germany had got down to a detailed study of the possibilities of "settlement of the Ukrainian question" and that Hitler had given orders to the German General Staff to start preparations for an attack on the USSR. The creation of a "Great Ukraine" which would have consisted of Soviet

and Polish regions inhabited by Ukrainians, as well as of the Transcarpathian Ukraine, was viewed by the Nazis as the most important component of German Eastern policy. The "Great Ukraine" by itself could exist in their opinion, "only if it unconditionally relied on Germany, which eventually must turn it into a German vassal".²¹⁷

Hitler: with Poland or Against Poland?

The Nazis opened negotiations with Poland, in particular, on the "Ukrainian question". Their hopes for success in negotiating a joint action against the USSR with the Polish government of the day were not unfounded. There has already been a reference earlier on to German-Polish co-operation in March 1938 when, following the Anschluss of Austria, Poland was particularly anxious to capture Lithuania. The talks about co-operation, including military co-operation, for the "full dismemberment of Czechoslovakia" and its liquidation as a state began between Polish Ambassador Lipski and Göring back in the middle of June.²¹⁸

On September 27 Beck directed the Ambassador in Berlin, Lipski to come to terms with Göring about Poland being informed in advance of the start of the German military actions against Czechoslovakia. "For your confidential information", Beck wrote, "I add that we have at our disposal forces under arms capable of action. Relative to the development of the situation we could take prompt action following the outbreak of a German-Czech conflict."²¹⁹

Lipski met the State Secretary of German Ministry for Foreign Affairs Weizsäcker to concert action by the two countries and agree on the "military demarcation line in the event of a Polish-Czech war". Right after the Four-Power Munich deal, in the night of September 30, Poland addressed an ultimatum to Czechoslovakia for the immediate transfer of the Teszyn region and on the following day started to move her troops into that region.

The German and Polish aggressors concluded what amounted, in point of fact, to an anti-Soviet military alliance to come into force if, with the Soviet Union coming to Czechoslovakia's aid in defence against Nazi Germany

and Poland, they would find themselves at war against the USSR. On September 30, the Polish government asked the Nazis whether it could count on Germany's benevolent reaction in case of an armed conflict between Poland and the USSR arising from an invasion of Czechoslovakia by Polish troops. On the following day, Lipski relayed to Warsaw the reply he got from von Ribbentrop: "In the event of a Polish-Soviet conflict, the government of Germany would take a more than benevolent position in respect of Poland." Besides, he made it quite clear that the government of Germany would be helpful.²²⁰ Göring also assured Lipski on October 1, that "in the event of complications with Russia Poland can count on most effective assistance from Germany".²²¹

The "Ukrainian question" came under intense study in Poland right after Munich. The *Biuletyn Polsko-Ukraiński*, published by Polish elements close to Beck in the territory of the Western Ukraine, seized by Poland in 1920, carried an article on October 2, 1938, about the plans of Polish imperialists. It called for the Soviet Union to be divided into a number of independent state entities with Kiev, Tbilisi, and Samarkand as capitals.

The question of a joint war of aggression by Germany and Poland against the USSR arose soon afterwards. Ribbentrop, speaking to Polish Ambassador Lipski on October 24, 1938, suggested "a general settlement of all possible points of friction between Germany and Poland". The suggestion implied the incorporation of Danzig (with economic privileges preserved in Danzig for Poland) to the Third Reich, the construction of a German extra-territorial autobahn and multiple track railroad through the Polish Corridor; the extension of the Polish-German Declaration of Friendship and non-aggression to 25 years; the provision of guarantees by Germany relative to the Polish-German border. Ribbentrop suggested that, having thus reinforced Polish-German friendship, the two countries should conduct a "joint policy towards Russia on the basis of the Anti-Comintern Pact".²²²

Japanese imperialists, planning for a joint three-power war against the Soviet Union, were also extremely interested in German-Polish co-operation against the USSR.²²³

The Polish Ambassador in Moscow, Grzybowski, maintained in a conversation with Poland's Vice-Minister for

Foreign Affairs Szeniowski that "Soviet Russia is getting progressively weaker" and "the Russian problem is looming". Grzybowski declared that Poland "must have influence on this problem", recalling that there had already been a historical precedent with Poland having "the final say in Russian affairs". He also quoted Pilsudski's words: "I shall march on Russia myself." Grzybowski spoke up for the restoration of the Polish frontiers of 1772. Nazi Germany considered, not without reason, that—on a par with Italy and Japan—"Poland will be Germany's natural ally in the future German-Russian conflict".²²⁴

The settlement of the German-Polish imperialist contradictions, connected with the realisation of their conspiracy against the USSR, proved far from simple, however. Nazi Germany, while urging the continued consolidation of German-Polish "friendship", saw it as Poland's full submission to German domination. Whereas the annexation of the Sudetenland by Germany was the first step towards the Nazis overrunning the whole of Czechoslovakia, the incorporation of Danzig was seen by the Nazis as a test of Poland's readiness for co-operation with Germany as would mean voluntary surrender. The Soviet military intelligence officer, Richard Sorge reported to Moscow on October 3, 1938, that the "Polish question" was the next foreign policy problem for Germany, but Germany and Poland were expected to settle it "amicably because of their joint war against the USSR".²²⁵ The Commissar of the League of Nations in Danzig C. Burckhardt also wrote on December 20 after his visit to Germany that the Ukraine was much of a talking point there: "Poland is being associated with such plans to a certain extent on the understanding, of course, that Warsaw will have to pay for it, that it will submit, that it will be 'reasonable' and will follow the way of the Czechs."²²⁶

One indicative statement was made by General Coestrin, the German Military Attaché in the USSR, in a conversation with the Lithuanian military attaché: "Poland is a poor horse harnessed by Germany for a time. . . . If Poland counts on Germany's assistance in her war against the USSR, she must know anyway that German troops, once in the Corridor and Silesia, will stay there."²²⁷

The ruling circles of Poland were prepared to co-operate with Germany in the imperialist plunder of foreign lands, particularly in action against the Soviet state. At the same

time they could not take delight in the prospect of Poland turning into a rightless vassal of Hitler Germany or of the Nazis capturing Polish lands. Still less so since it would have produced a storm of indignation among the Polish people. Nor did the Polish government like the idea of a German-controlled "Ukrainian state" being created because it feared that the Nazis would want to annex to it also the Ukrainian lands which formed part of Poland (that is, the lands alienated by Poland from the Soviet state in 1920). Thus, the Vice-Director of the Political Department of Poland's Ministry for Foreign Affairs, T. Kobylanski, emphasised in a conversation with the German Embassy Counsellor in Poland, von Sebeliah, on November 18, that if the Germans refrained from their idea of creating a "Great Ukraine", "Poland would be willing subsequently to join Germany in a march on the Soviet Ukraine". Otherwise, such action could turn out to be impossible, he pointed out.²²⁸

It was, therefore, the reverse side of the medal that began to show itself little by little as did the "price" which the Nazi Reich wanted Poland to pay for her part in plundering foreign lands. Yet quite a few individuals among the ruling circles of Poland were prepared to co-operate with the Nazis almost under any terms. J. Beck declared, for instance, to U.S. Ambassador Biddle that Poland "might have" to co-operate with Germany in creating a Ukrainian state at the expense of some of the territory of Poland, the USSR and Romania.²²⁹

Some pronouncements by Karszo-Siedlewski, a former Polish Embassy Counsellor in Moscow, who was appointed as Minister in Iran in December, were particularly noteworthy in this respect. Karszo-Siedlewski said in a conversation with von Cheliah on December 28, 1938, that in a few years Germany would be fighting the Soviet Union and "Poland will support . . . Germany in that war. It will be better for Poland to side with Germany quite definitely before the conflict breaks out since Poland's territorial interests in the West and Poland's political objectives in the East, above all in the Ukraine, can be secured only through a Polish-German agreement achieved well in advance".²³⁰

The Nazis missed no opportunity, in meeting Polish diplomats afterwards, to raise the question of anti-Soviet co-operation between the two countries. Hitler remarked in his

conversation with Beck on January 5, 1939, that there was a full community of interests between Germany and Poland with regard to Russia.²³¹ As he answered a question from Ribbentrop on the following day whether or not the Polish government had forsworn Pilsudski's claims against the Ukraine, Beck, reaffirming Poland's aggressive designs, stressed that the Poles "had even been in Kiev, and that these aspirations were doubtless, still alive today."²³²

During his visit to Poland on January 26, 1939, Ribbentrop raised the matter again. Hitler's Minister once more offered to Beck to establish collaboration between Germany and Poland with regard to the Soviet Union and also in creating the "Great Ukraine". "Mr. Beck made no secret," the transcript of that conversation said, "of the fact that Poland had aspirations directed toward the Soviet Ukraine and a connection with the Black Sea." On hearing such a statement from the Polish Minister, Ribbentrop raised the question of Poland joining the Anti-Comintern Pact, so that she could find herself "in the same boat" with Germany. Beck promised him that "he would give further careful consideration" to this question.²³³ At the end of the visit, the German Ambassador in Warsaw, H. Moltke, declared, replying to the question about Poland's position in the event of a clash between Germany and Russia: "The situation is quite clear. We know that Poland will be at our side in the event of a German-Russian conflict. That is quite definite."²³⁴

In case of a joint war with Germany against the USSR, Poland's ruling quarters preferred to see German troops moved against the Soviet Union through the territory of other countries, rather than through Poland. The People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs pointed out on February 19, 1939, that Poland was dreaming of turning the Soviet Ukraine into her own sphere of influence. "She will, however, be ready to give up her dreams, in case of necessity, and would not object to Hitler passing through Rumania on his way to Russia. . . . Nor would Poland object to Hitler marching through the Baltic states and Finland to leave her free to act against the Ukraine in time to coincide with the policy of Japan."²³⁵

However, while in the first few months following Munich the Nazis did consider joint action with Poland against the Soviet Union, that did not prevent them from circumstan-

tially working out another version, that is, the plans of war against Poland as well as against France and Britain. By the end of December, 1938, the further Nazi plans of aggression had been, in fact, finally clarified. It was decided to do away with Czechoslovakia in the spring of 1939 and then with Poland so as to act against France and Britain in the subsequent year, having collected enough strength and strengthened the rear.²³⁸

True, the German press went on discussing for a while the "Ukrainian question" but that was nothing short of misinformation designed to withhold the actual Nazi plans.

In the meantime the Nazis got down to some specific action in preparation for an attack on Poland. At a conference which Ribbentrop had with Nazi generals on January 22, it was stated that the German-Polish declaration of 1934 would be observed only as long as it was found worthwhile. It was envisaged that steps would be taken to "strain relations with Poland to such an extent as to make nothing but a military solution of the issue possible."²³⁷

The Attack on the USSR Postponed

As the subsequent events had shown, the expectations of reactionary elements in Britain, France and the United States for aggression to be turned towards the Soviet frontiers were found to have been built on quick-sand. The aggressors had a fairly good idea of the strength and might of the Red Army and could not venture into anti-Soviet gamble. Besides, Japan got bogged down deep in the war against China. Before that war was over, she could actually consider attacking the USSR only in the event of a Soviet-German conflict. Germany, on her part, did not consider herself to be prepared sufficiently enough in the military sense to venture into a war against the USSR.

At a conference with Keitel and Brauchitsch on November 16 Hitler set out his plan to sign a military alliance with Italy for a war against France and Britain. Italy would confront them in the Mediterranean and in North Africa, while German forces would attack France.²³⁸ One of fascist "experts" on the problems of Eastern Europe, W. Markert had information that prior to November and

December 1938, the Nazis had intended to hasten a "clash with Moscow and to that end get Poland to serve as an ally against the Soviet Union". Ribbentrop and Rosenberg "were in favour of war against the Soviet Union by exploiting the Ukrainian question. The decisive change in the evaluation of the political situation and the chances for war in Eastern Europe came about somewhere around Christmas." After his long sojourn in Obersalzberg, Hitler declared, referring to war against the USSR, that some time was still needed for its thorough preparation.²³⁹

The progressive change in the alignment of forces in Europe in favour of the aggressive powers and more particularly, the swelling tide of information that Germany was preparing to direct her blow not against the USSR, but against Poland, France and Britain, ultimately began to worry the Western powers.

However, in the *Diaries* of Oliver Harvey, personal secretary of the British Foreign Secretary, we find the following anxious entry dating from as early as November 13, 1938: "Every scrap of information, secret and public, we get from Germany now shows that the German Government is laughing at us, despising us and intending to dispossess us morally and materially from our world position."²⁴⁰ On the following day Lord Halifax, addressing a meeting of the government's Foreign Policy Committee, made a summary of confidential reports indicating that the Nazi Reich was "becoming increasingly anti-British and that their intention was to work for the disintegration of the British Empire and, if possible, for the domination of the world by the German nation."²⁴¹

The First Secretary of the British Embassy in Berlin, I. Kirkpatrick, arrived in London in mid-December with some material to prove that the Nazis were planning aggression not only eastwards but westwards as well.

Chamberlain, however, still hoped for a success of the course he had mapped out. With reference to the proposed measures to strengthen Britain's ability to resist German aggression, he declared at a Cabinet meeting that these proposals "did not tally with his impression of Hitler's next move, which would be eastwards, in which case we might well not be involved at all."²⁴²

A Foreign Office memorandum submitted to the British government on January 19, 1939, summarised the available

information about the Nazi plans which was obtained from various secret sources. In the introductory note to the memorandum Halifax pointed out that "hitherto it had been generally expected that Hitler's designs would lead him eastward, and more particularly that he was planning something in the Ukraine. More recently, we have been receiving reports showing that he has decided that the moment is propitious for dealing an overwhelming blow at the Western powers."²⁴³ The Foreign Office had information at the time that the Nazis intended to start large-scale armed action by smashing Poland.²⁴⁴

The French General Staff also arrived at the conclusion that Germany would rather launch an attack in the West than a war against the USSR.²⁴⁵

Nevertheless, the British Ambassador in Berlin, Henderson, told Hitler on March 2, 1939 (on his return from a trip to London) that Chamberlain and Halifax "are still thinking on lines of Munich". Henderson expressed his readiness to start negotiations with Führer on that basis.²⁴⁶ The Nazi Chancellor, however, did not honour the Ambassador with a reply. He did not want any agreement with Britain, nor did he intend to concert any of his action with her. Still less so since Henderson's offer clearly indicated that the British government did not mean to put up any resistance to the Nazi Reich's aggressive aspirations.

To sum up, by early 1939, the Nazi Reich, enjoying the benefit of the policy of abetting German aggression that was pursued by Britain, France and the United States, came to occupy the dominant position in Central Europe. The expectations of Chamberlain and his fellow thinkers that they could strike a deal with the Nazis so as to push them into an act of aggression eastwards, against the USSR, turned out to have been unfounded. The Nazis, while planning their further land-grabbing plans, preferred to have to deal with weaker opponents for the time being. They did not as yet make as bold as to confront the USSR.

Chapter IV

ON THE THRESHOLD OF WAR

NAZI ACTS OF AGGRESSION. POSITIONS OF THE USSR AND WESTERN POWERS

The spring of 1939 proved to be the last one before the war. A certain calm which was in evidence during the winter months was coming to an end. That was the calm before the storm. The Nazi Reich was heading for war.

By March the Nazi plans of aggression began to materialise. Here is how they were set out on March 13 by Ribbentrop's adviser Peter Kleist who had helped him work out those plans. The decision was to occupy the whole of Czechoslovakia whereupon Germany would be holding Hungary, Romania and Yugoslavia in her grip and would have created a military threat to Poland. The annexation of Memel would enable Germany to "strike root, solid and firm, in the Baltic as well". Whereas in earlier times, the idea was to involve Poland in war against the USSR, now Germany's intentions had changed. "It is obvious," Kleist said, "that Poland must first be territorially divided (with the regions once belonging to Germany being detached and a West Ukrainian state formed under a German protectorate) and politically organised (with Polish state leaders reliable from the German point of view being appointed)" All those measures were to strengthen Germany's rear whereupon the idea was to launch an "action against the West". Somewhat later he specified that the rout of Poland would be followed by a "Western phase" which was to have ended in the defeat of France and Britain. After that, the "great and decisive clash with the Soviet Union and the smashing of the Soviets would become possible."¹

German Aggressors in Prague

Hitler's troops entered Prague on March 15, 1939. Czechoslovakia was liquidated as an independent state by German Nazism. Although Britain and France, while foisting the terms of the Munich deal on Czechoslovakia, had promised her their guarantees of aid, they gave her none in those tragic days.

The British government had precise information about the coming events four days in advance. Yet it feigned ignorance. It was only on March 14 that Halifax, faced by increasingly alarming news reaching London called a conference to consider the line Britain was going to take. It was agreed, his assistant Oliver Harvey wrote later on in his account of that meeting, that "we must make no empty threats since we were not going to fight for Czechoslovakia.... We should not, however, regard ourselves as in any way guaranteeing Czechoslovakia".²

Chamberlain unofficially informed the Führer that he "quite sympathized with Germany's move" in seizing Czechoslovakia, "even though he was unable to say so in public".³

That was also the position of the United States. Assistant Secretary of State A. Berle pointed out in his diaries on March 17 that Roosevelt "was not particularly bothered" by Germany's seizure of Czechoslovakia: "Like many Englishmen, /he/ may have calculated that a German advance to the East would at least afford relief" to Britain and France.⁴

It was the Soviet government alone that proceeded from a position of principle in its reaction to the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia.

A detailed account of Soviet foreign policy in the prevailing circumstances was given in the Report by the Central Committee of the CPSU(B) to the 18th Party Congress which was presented by Stalin on March 10, 1939. He criticised both the aggressors and the policy of encouraging aggression which was pursued by the Western powers. The Report contained a serious warning that the big and dangerous political gamble started by the partisans of non-intervention policy might well end in a serious failure for them. It pointed out that it was necessary to "show caution and not to allow our country to be involved in conflicts

by the instigators of war who are used to having somebody else pull the chestnuts out of the fire for them".

The Report contained a clear and well-defined account of the fundamentals of Soviet foreign policy:

"1. We stand for peace and for the consolidation of business contacts with all nations, we stand and we shall stand by this principle as long as these nations abide by the same type of relationship with the Soviet Union and as long as they refrain from infringing the interests of our country.

2. We stand for peaceful, close and good-neighbourly relations with all neighbouring countries having a common border with the USSR...

3. We stand for supporting the peoples who have fallen victim to aggression and who are in battle for their national independence..."⁵

The USSR strongly condemned Nazi aggression against Czechoslovakia and branded the aggressors. On March 18, the Soviet government sent a note to the government of Germany, pointing out that Germany's action "cannot but be qualified arbitrary, violent and aggressive". The Soviet government declared that it could not agree to Czechoslovakia being incorporated in the German Empire.⁶

By seizing Czechoslovakia, Germany did away with one of the possible allies of France and other opponents of the Reich in the event of war. It is worth recalling that Czechoslovakia could have fielded upwards of 30 well-armed divisions in case of war. Now, however, those arms could be used by the Nazis for an attack on other countries. Having surrounded Poland from three sides, the Nazi Reich obtained extremely good vantage ground for attacking her. The position of Romania had drastically worsened as well, notably because she had been supplied with war equipment by the Škoda factories.

London Changed Methods, Not Aims

Having moved into a position of advantage, by occupying Czechoslovakia, to go ahead with its aggression, the Nazi Reich started preparing to attack Poland. An immediate danger of German aggression faced Romania and many other European countries, too.

Meanwhile, the forces of the European countries, threatened by aggression, turned out to be disunited because of the subversive action by the aggressors and the policy of the Munich "appeasers". London and Paris did whatever they could to channel German aggression against the USSR, having first put it into international isolation. But when it became clear in the spring of 1939 that the Nazi Reich preferred to deal with weaker opponents for the time being rather than with the USSR, it turned out that by trying to isolate the Soviet Union, Britain, France, Poland and some other countries had placed themselves in a position of still greater and more dangerous isolation.

The ruling circles of Britain and France finally had to admit that they would never secure "general settlement" with Germany by means of their earlier concessions and handouts.

Without giving up the earlier objectives of their policies, the British and French governments decided to take some steps towards strengthening their international positions. That was what brought about the Anglo-French guarantees for Poland and some other countries. To try and induce Hitler to change his plans and, eventually, accept the idea of a "general settlement", that is, one of imperialist collusion with Britain and France, the British and French governments decided to scare the Nazis a bit by a possible Anglo-Franco-Soviet rapprochement.

Neither Chamberlain nor Daladier, however, had so much as contemplated any rapprochement, let alone co-operation, with the USSR in the struggle against aggression. That was nothing more than a diplomatic trick in a bid to divert the dangerous hurricane that was brewing in the centre of Europe, and turn it eastwards.

London and Paris saw their links with the countries of Eastern Europe and their contact with the USSR as the last resort they might turn to if the Western powers failed to come to terms with the Nazis and found themselves at war with Germany.

Besides, the British and French governments feared that should the Soviet Union, faced by the stance of Britain and France, have finally concluded that it was impossible to set up a collective front to safeguard peace, it would have to look for other ways to assure its own security. In particular, they were afraid that the USSR, once forced into

isolation, might agree to some form of normalising relations with Germany, for instance, by signing a non-aggression pact with her.⁷ Now, Germany's intention to reduce tensions in relations with the Soviet Union somehow was no longer much of a secret to the diplomatic services of the Western powers.

The ruling circles of Britain and France had to take into account, besides, the mounting demand of the mass of the people in their countries for steps to avert the danger of aggression and, in particular, to establish close co-operation with the USSR.

Soviet Initiative in Calling a Conference

The aggressive plans, being harboured by Germany, Japan and Italy, were, indisputably, a tremendous danger to the USSR. The oft-repeated statements by German Nazis and Japanese militarists that they considered the destruction of the Soviet state to be their overriding objective were well known.

The Soviet government, considering the mounting danger of war, was taking additional measures to build up national defences. The growing Soviet defence strength was, undoubtedly, the major factor which had deterred the aggressors for a time from action against the USSR.

At the same time, the Soviet Union was prepared to make the utmost contribution towards action to avert aggression and keep the peace. Should Britain and France have displayed a real desire to co-operate with the USSR, that would have been fully reciprocated by the Soviet government to stem the tide of German aggression.

Naturally, the Soviet government could not fail to take into account the bitter experience of earlier years, above all, of the immediately preceding developments when the governments of Britain and France had openly set course towards an imperialist deal with Hitler and Mussolini, in Munich and afterwards. For the foreign policies of Britain and France in those years betrayed their reluctance to co-operate with the USSR in the struggle against aggression. It was clear that they had no objection to German and Japanese aggression, provided it was against the Soviet Union, not against them.

Nevertheless, the Soviet government still earnestly tried in the spring and summer of 1939 to come to terms with Britain and France on a collective peace-keeping front so as, by joint efforts, to curb the Nazi aggressors and prevent them starting war. There was a hope that the increasingly aggressive policy of the Nazis and the mounting pressure from the mass of the people in Britain and France, worried as they were by the threat of war, could eventually force a change in the position of the British and French governments. But, as this book will yet show, the British and French ruling circles had brought the negotiations just started with the USSR to a deadlock, having thus cleared the way for the Nazi Reich to trigger off the war.

That was demonstrated by the very opening of Soviet-British contacts in March 1939.

Two days after the German troops had been moved into Czechoslovakia, it was learned in London that the Nazis were hard at work to establish their economic and political domination of Romania. The matter was treated as urgent at a British Cabinet meeting on March 18. There was the apprehension that this might lead to Germany establishing her domination of Europe and to German troops reaching the Mediterranean with the result that Britain might be reduced to the status of a second-rate power. Should the Romanian agricultural products and oil have fallen into Germany's hands, Britain's attempts to impose a blockade on the Reich in the event of war would have been futile. The British Minister for Co-ordination of Defence, Lord Chatfield, admitted that Britain was not in a position to prevent German domination of Romania. But with Poland and the USSR ready to take part in agreement, the situation would have been entirely different. In such a case, Britain should have joined forces with them in resisting German aggression. The government confined itself, however, to deciding to inquire about the position of the governments of the USSR, Poland, Yugoslavia, Turkey, Greece and Romania, and also to reach an understanding with France on eventual action.⁸

On the same day the British Ambassador in Moscow, W. Seeds, asked the Soviet People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Litvinov, about the position the Soviet Union would take in the event of German aggression against Romania. The Soviet government decided to take the opportunity to

raise the question of collective action to oppose aggression as a matter of the utmost gravity. A few hours later Seeds was in possession of the Soviet government's proposal for the immediate international conference to be called by the USSR, Britain, France, Poland, Romania and Turkey.⁹

London Deemed Action Against Aggression "Premature"

Chamberlain and Halifax decided to turn down this proposal as inconsistent with the general tenor of their foreign policy without even so much as bringing it before the government. On March 19, Halifax told the Soviet Ambassador in London that to call the Soviet-proposed conference would be "premature".¹⁰ The said Soviet proposal was also communicated to the French government but there had been no reply whatsoever from France. The Soviet government could make only one conclusion, and that is that Britain and France were essentially carrying on their former policies.¹¹

Since it was still utterly impossible to fail to react to Nazi Germany's acts of aggression altogether, Halifax submitted a proposal, formulated together with Chamberlain the day before, to a British Cabinet meeting on March 20 to publish a declaration by the governments of Britain, France, the USSR and Poland whereby they would "pledge to consult together" in the event of any danger to the political independence of any European state. Not even Halifax could fail to admit that the publication of such a declaration about consultations "was not a very heroic decision". Chamberlain, on the contrary, considered that the draft had an advantage in the sense that it avoided "specific commitments" and left it open what would constitute a "threat" and what particular steps should be taken in the event of such a threat. The draft was approved by the members of the Cabinet.¹²

After the Cabinet meeting Halifax brought the draft declaration to the knowledge of the French Ambassador in London, Corbin. The latter stated with ample ground that such a declaration would be interpreted by other nations to mean that in the event of fresh aggression the four powers would only talk rather than take any action.¹³ Halifax

found himself compelled to accept some corrections in the draft declaration.

On March 21, the British government proposed that Britain, France, the USSR and Poland should join in producing a declaration to say that, in the event of any action constituting a threat to the political independence of any European nation, they pledged themselves to consult together immediately about steps to be taken for common resistance to such action.¹⁴

The publication of such a declaration could not have been anything like a serious means to counter aggression. But since even that declaration could have been at least some step forward towards creating a peace-keeping front, the Soviet government took but a day to give its consent.¹⁵ A few days later, however, British Assistant Foreign Secretary Cadogan told the Soviet Ambassador that "the Poles quite categorically, and Romanians somewhat less decisively have announced that they will not join any combination (be it in form of declaration or any other form) that will also include the USSR".¹⁶

Because of their class hatred of the USSR, the Polish ruling circles did not wish to co-operate with it even in the face of a mortal danger to Poland. In the hope of somehow coming to an understanding with the Nazis, they did not want to commit themselves to any declaration and prevented its publication. On March 25, Beck instructed Lipski, the Polish Ambassador in Berlin, to assure Ribbentrop that Poland would, as always, oppose the USSR taking part in European affairs.¹⁷ In that way, Poland's rulers were taking the line of outright betrayal of the national interests and of the Polish people.

At the talks of Chamberlain and Halifax with French President Lebrun and Bonnet in London on March 21 and 22 it was decided to intensify co-operation between the General Staffs of the two countries. The main thing the talks revealed was Britain's reluctance to afford real aid even to the French: she intended to send just a few divisions to France and even that not immediately after the outbreak of hostilities. Besides, it was decided that in any event, even if fascist Germany attacked Poland, the strategy of Britain and France would be defensive, not offensive.¹⁸

The Nazi Reich was increasingly insolent and arrogant. Back on March 21, Ribbentrop had started a diplomatic

build-up to the war against Poland. In a peremptory tone he demanded that the Polish government should consent to Danzig being annexed to Germany and to an extra-territorial Autobahn being laid through Polish territory into Eastern Prussia. With a view to creating a "conflict situation" between Germany and Poland, these proposals were framed in such a way as to prevent them from being accepted by the Polish government in any circumstances. On March 22, the Nazis captured Klajpeda. Klajpeda's status was guaranteed by Britain and France, but they did not budge to aid Lithuania. On March 23, the Nazis struck again by forcing a fettering economic agreement on Romania.

The statement made by the Soviet Commissar for Foreign Affairs to the British Secretary for Overseas Trade, Robert Hudson, who arrived in Moscow on March 23, 1939 was of great importance under the circumstances. Proceeding from the fact of an aggressive bloc in existence, the People's Commissar emphasised, one should not deny the need for meetings, conferences and agreements between non-aggressive states. In particular, the Soviet government had always been willing to co-operate with Great Britain and to consider and discuss any concrete proposals.¹⁹

Hudson did not even mention that statement in his report to the British government about his trip to Moscow. Instead, he pronounced himself against an extension of relations with the USSR.²⁰

Apart from that appeal to Britain, the Soviet government found it necessary to establish contact with its Western neighbours, facing a threatened German attack, for the purpose of resisting aggression. On March 28, 1939, it forwarded a statement to the governments of Latvia and Estonia saying that the USSR was interested in preventing the aggressors' domination of the Baltic states, for that would run counter both to the interests of the people of those countries and to the vital interests of the Soviet state. The Soviet government declared that it could not stand by looking indifferently at Germany establishing domination of the Baltic area and was prepared to prove that if need be.²¹ The Soviet government was likewise anxious for the independence of Poland and Romania to be preserved, notably, because for Germany to have overrun them would have given the Nazi troops an opportunity of reaching the Western borders of the USSR.

The Soviet government considered it desirable to establish direct contact and co-operation with those countries themselves in opposing aggression. On March 29, 1939, Litvinov told the Romanian Minister in Moscow, N. Dianu, that the USSR could not "react with indifference to an aggressor nation's domination of Romania or to the possibility for her to obtain strongpoints in the vicinity of our frontier or in the Black Sea ports."²² On the same day Litvinov, replying to a question from the French Chargé d'Affaires in Moscow, J. Payart, about whether or not the USSR was ready to co-operate with Poland, told him: "We consider it very important to co-operate with Poland and we have always offered her as much."²³

Since Poland refused to co-operate with the USSR, the British and French governments were wondering whom they could regard as their more important ally in Eastern Europe, Poland or the USSR. Chamberlain and Halifax considered that Poland and Romania which hated the Soviet Union mattered more to Britain than the USSR.²⁴ British historian Aster wrote: "The Soviet Union, after a brief diplomatic appearance, was being nudged back into its isolation."²⁵

It was recognised at a conference which Halifax had with the senior staff of the Foreign Office on March 25, that since a war on two fronts was Germany's Achilles' heel, it was necessary to cut Poland off from Germany and draw her into co-operation with Britain and France. Halifax pointed out that in the event of Poland staying neutral, Germany could attack Romania or Western powers. Therefore, he considered it necessary to agree with Poland on mutual assistance and to get her committed to come to Romania's aid in the event of her being attacked by Germany.²⁶

Chamberlain approved this plan and at a meeting of the Foreign Policy Committee on March 27, urged co-operation with Poland. The British Premier could not fail to note on that occasion that the new plan "left Soviet Russia out of the picture". Even Samuel Hoare, having qualified his statement by saying that no one could accuse him of any predilections in favour of the Soviet Union, stressed that it was very important to bring in to the common front as many countries as possible. Halifax was strongly supported by Chamberlain. "If we had to make a choice between

Poland and Soviet Russia," he declared, "it seemed clear that Poland would give the greater value". He said, furthermore, that French Foreign Minister Bonnet "had no love for Soviet Russia" either and that "France seemed little interested in Russia". The British lord pointed out that Poland had "some 50 divisions and might be expected to make a useful contribution", whereas the Soviet Army's "offensive value was small".²⁷

Two days later the matter came before a British Cabinet meeting. Halifax addressed it with arguments to prove that Poland was the "key to the situation". In spite of the serious doubts expressed by Home Secretary Samuel Hoare and Secretary for Public Health Elliot to the effect that it was undesirable to exclude the Soviet Union from the group of countries invited to co-operate, the Cabinet approved the course suggested by Chamberlain and Halifax.²⁸

Anglo-French Guarantees

On March 29, London received information about the proposals which Ribbentrop had restated to Lipski on March 24 about an "adjustment" of German-Polish relations. That information threw the British government into confusion because it feared a German-Polish collusion as most dangerous to the Western powers. In early March the British government had invited Beck to visit London. But on March 18 it received "absolutely reliable" information from the Secretary-General of the French Foreign Ministry, A. Léger, that Beck was going to propose an alliance in London but on the understanding that the offer would be found unacceptable (throughout the 1920s and 1930s the British government flatly refused to assume any commitment regarding aid to the countries of Eastern Europe). Beck would then return to Poland and announce that his proposal had been rejected after which he would say that "there had been two alternatives for Poland, viz. to lean on Great Britain or Germany, and that now it was clear that she must lean on Germany." Beck was prepared to find a way out "even at the cost of being the vassal (perhaps the chief vassal) of the new Napoleon".²⁹ The British were alerted also by the information they had about the Nazis planning some pressure tactics to apply against Poland in

a matter of days. It was feared in London that this could bring Poland's politics under Berlin's control all the faster, which would virtually put her into the opposite camp.³⁰

During the discussion of the matter at a British Cabinet meeting on March 30, Halifax proposed to make a clear declaration of Britain's intention to support Poland if Poland was attacked by Germany. Chamberlain backed it up. He pointed out that Czechoslovakia's resources had already been used by Germany, if Poland's resources fell into the Reich's hands, too, that would entail very grave consequences for Britain. The Minister of Co-ordination of Defence admitted that in the event of Nazi acts of aggression Poland would hold out no more than two or three months. Nevertheless, Germany would suffer heavy casualties as well, he went on to say. It was pointed out at the meeting that unless the British government took up a firm stand in good time in the face of a threat to Poland, Britain's prestige throughout the world would be badly damaged.³¹

To sum up, the British ruling quarters were thinking of nothing beyond using Polish cannon fodder for a time. They did not even contemplate any real assistance to Poland to save her from being defeated. But, in fact, Germany's seizure of Poland could have been averted! The Soviet Union, being, unlike Britain, profoundly interested in preventing Poland from being destroyed, was ready and willing to throw the full weight of its power on the scales of war for the sake of preserving her independence and inviolability. But the issue of Britain's co-operation with the USSR was not even raised at the British Cabinet meeting.

On March 31, 1939, the British government published a statement to announce its readiness to afford assistance to Poland in the event of aggression against her. The Anglo-Polish Communiqué, issued at the end of Beck's visit to London, pointed out that Britain and Poland had achieved agreement on mutual assistance "in the event of any threat, direct or indirect, to the independence of either".³²

The British informed Beck about their plan to conclude an agreement involving Britain, France, Poland and Romania. However, the Polish government rejected the offer. Ever since 1921 Poland had been in alliance with Romania against the USSR. She did not want to extend her commitments to cover a case of conflict between Germany and Romania.³³ The government of Romania, too, took up a neg-

ative stand on this offer, having informed Berlin about it.³⁴

Anglo-French guarantees were soon given also to Romania and Greece, and somewhat later to Turkey.

While offering these guarantees to Poland and other of the above-mentioned countries, the British and French governments presented them as disinterested concern for their fate. The consideration of the issue of guarantees at a meeting of the British government's Foreign Policy Committee is noteworthy. "The Prime Minister recalled," the verbatim report of the committee meeting said, "that our general policy towards Germany was directed not to protecting individual states which might be threatened by Germany but to prevent German domination of the continent resulting in Germany becoming so powerful as to be able to menace our security. German domination of Poland or Romania would increase her military strength and it was for this reason that we had given guarantees to those countries. German domination of Denmark would not increase Germany's military strength and this therefore was not a case in which we should be bound to intervene forcibly to restore the status quo."³⁵

This means that Britain had no interests on her mind beyond her own. Poland, Romania and Denmark and other countries interested her only in the sense of their potential military, strategic or economic importance for British imperialism. Not even British bourgeois historians can fail to admit that the British Cabinet cared just as little for Poland as for the Sudetenland.³⁶

The French government proceeded from a similar position. The German embassy in Paris reported to Berlin (April 20, 1939) that the position of France was determined not by her sympathy for Poland (it had been destroyed by the co-operation of the Polish ruling element with the Nazis in earlier years) but "only by an intention to bar the way to a German onslaught".³⁷

The French General Staff also considered that it was necessary to counter German aggressive designs with regard to the countries of Eastern Europe because otherwise France might find her positions undermined. Poland with her army and geographical position was recognised to be "too important for France to neglect". As to Romania, the seizure of her oil resources by Germany was considered very

dangerous in France. The conclusion made in France was that with Poland and Romania captured, Germany would turn her military machine against France, and she would have to go to war alone, virtually without allies.³⁸

However, the importance of the Anglo-French guarantees for Poland, Romania and some other countries was very relative. This was indicated to Chamberlain by Britain's former Prime Minister Lloyd George back on March 30. He declared that any real resistance to Germany in the East can be organised only with the participation of the USSR; the unilateral British guarantees to Poland were "an irresponsible gamble".³⁹ Lloyd George spoke in the same vein in the House of Commons debate on April 3. Similar views were stated in the debate by some other MPs as well.

The Soviet embassy in Britain also wrote on the occasion: "What can, indeed, Britain (or even Britain and France, put together) really do for Poland and Romania in the event of a German attack against them? Very little. Before a British blockade of Germany becomes a formidable threat to her, Poland and Romania will have ceased to exist."⁴⁰

Poland's Minister for Foreign Affairs Beck arrived in London on April 3. The British proposed transforming their unilateral commitments into a bilateral treaty of mutual assistance and that was accepted. The preliminary Anglo-Polish treaty of mutual assistance was signed on April 6. Poland, however, had not agreed to afford assistance to Romania in the event of a German attack against her. Beck also declined the offer to come to agreement with the USSR on its lending material aid to Poland in case of war. Moreover he did not conceal his extremely hostile attitude towards the Soviet Union.

The British and French guarantees, however, were not a sufficiently strong instrument of pressure on Germany. That was indicated by the fact that on April 3, Hitler released a directive for German troops to be prepared to attack Poland on September 1, 1939. On April 11, he signed the notorious Operation Weiß, that is, the plan for the military rout of Poland.

As the situation continued to deteriorate, there was more action in Britain and France against the masterminds of the Munich sellout and for a reversal of the foreign policies of the two countries. An opinion poll in Britain held

in April and early in May showed 87 per cent of the population of that country favoured an alliance between Britain, France and the USSR. The sobering process in France went on even relatively faster than in Britain. And that was understandable because she found herself under a more immediate threat. Paris figured out that Germany and Italy combined could master 250 divisions against 120 French and British. Therefore it was found necessary in Paris to give more careful consideration to co-operation with the USSR. President of the Chamber of Deputies Herriot offered his good offices to Daladier to go to Moscow to conclude the treaty.⁴¹

The Chamberlain government, however, still considered it undesirable to assume any obligations in common with the USSR. But having offered its guarantees to Poland and Romania, it started pressing for the Soviet government to assume unilateral commitments to assist the countries of Eastern Europe if they were attacked.

So on April 11, Halifax, in a conversation with the Soviet Ambassador in London, referred to "the form in which the USSR could offer assistance to Romania in case of a German attack". On April 4, Maisky, on instructions from the Soviet government, told Halifax that the USSR could not look at Romania's fate with indifference and was prepared to join in providing assistance to her, but it wanted to know how the British government contemplated the forms of assistance to Romania from Britain and other powers concerned.⁴² The chief of the British foreign service left the Soviet government's quite natural and logical counter-question unanswered.

British diplomacy continued to press for the USSR to assume unilateral commitments, disregarding the consequences. On April 15, the British Ambassador in Moscow, Seeds, on instructions from Halifax, officially raised with the Soviet government the question of whether it was agreeable to publish a declaration to the effect that any of the Soviet Union's European neighbours could count on Soviet assistance in case of aggression should it find that assistance desirable.⁴³

This proposal provided for the Soviet assistance to Poland and Romania, which had Anglo-French guarantees, as well as to other European neighbours of the USSR—Latvia, Estonia and Finland, which had no such guarantees. There-

fore, the publication of such a declaration by the Soviet government could have left the Soviet Union with no option but to fight Germany alone, in the event of German aggression in the Baltic, while Britain and France would stay out.

An extremely dangerous situation would have arisen for the USSR even in the event of a German-Polish or German-Romanian conflict. Britain and France, in spite of their guarantees to Poland and Romania, could have virtually kept out of the war (as it did happen in September 1939). The Soviet Union, having spoken out for assistance to Poland or Romania, could, under such circumstances, find itself at war with Germany actually without any allies to speak of.

Besides, the commitments about mutual assistance between Britain and France, on the one hand, and Poland, on the other, were of a mutual nature: in the event of an attack on Poland, she was to have been supported by Britain and France, and in the event of an aggressor's attack on Britain or France, Poland was to have come to their assistance. But the Soviet guarantees to Poland were to have been of a unilateral character, to follow the British demand. For example, if Germany attacked the USSR, Poland was not under obligation to afford assistance to the Soviet Union. The Soviet government even had no guarantees that Poland under the circumstances would not join Germany in a war against the USSR.

Even Western diplomats themselves admitted in private that Britain's position with respect to the USSR was unseemly. The U.S. Ambassador in Paris, Bullitt, pointed out that the British government's policy with regard to the Soviet Union was "almost insulting".⁴⁴ Now even Ambassador Seeds could not fail to admit in his cable to the Foreign Office that the British inquiry created the impression that Britain had no serious intention of reaching agreement with the USSR.

The contacts established in March-April 1939, between the Soviet government, on the one hand, and the governments of Britain and France, on the other, about the ways to maintain peace in Europe showed once more the earnest aspiration of the Soviet Union for collective resistance to fascist aggression. The ruling circles of Britain and France, however, in fact, persisted in their Munich policy, reluctant to co operate with the USSR.

TALKS BETWEEN THE USSR, BRITAIN AND FRANCE

Soviet Proposals for Three-Power Co-operation

On April 17, 1939, the Soviet Union turned to Britain and France with concrete far-reaching proposals. It called for Britain, France and the USSR to conclude an agreement of mutual assistance; for the Three Powers to afford assistance to the countries of Eastern Europe, bordering on the USSR, in the event of aggression against them.

In accordance with the Soviet proposals, the Three Powers were to have discussed and fixed the size and form of military aid, within the shortest time-limits, which each of them was going to give to the victim of aggression, that is, to conclude a military convention. The treaty of mutual assistance and military convention were to have been signed for a term of 5-10 years simultaneously. They were to have been banned from concluding a separate peace with the aggressor in the eventuality of an armed conflict.⁴⁵ As he handed these proposals to British Ambassador Seeds, the Soviet People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs stressed the importance of both agreements, political and military, being signed simultaneously.

These proposals presented a clear programme for the establishment of a reliable peace-keeping front in Europe, based on close co-operation with the USSR, Britain and France. Those were the proposals which the Soviet government persisted to get implemented in the course of the subsequent Anglo-Franco-Soviet negotiations. To have put them into effect would have meant raising a dependable barrier in the aggressors' way.

London Opposed to Agreement with the USSR

The Soviet proposals met, however, no support from the British and French governments. Paradoxical though it might seem today, they found them unacceptable. Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Cadogan immediately drew out a memo about the Soviet proposals to submit to the government's Foreign Policy Committee. That document clearly reflected the full extent of the hatred the British ruling top leadership had for the USSR.

"The Russian proposal," Cadogan wrote, "is extremely inconvenient." "We have to balance the advantage of a paper commitment [!] by Russia to join in a war on our side against the disadvantage [!] of associating ourselves openly with Russia". Cadogan claimed that "the political arguments against ... accepting the Soviet proposal ... were irresistible". However, he pointed out that the "left wing in England" would use its rejection in their struggle against the government. Besides, if Britain turned down the Soviet proposal, "the Soviets might make some 'non-intervention' agreement with the German Government".⁴⁶

The debates on the Soviet proposals at the meeting of the British government's Foreign Policy Committee on April 19 meant, essentially, that Britain had no interest except in the Soviet deliveries of war equipment to Poland and Romania in the event of a German attack against them. Setting out his position, Chamberlain emphasised that there was no need for an Anglo-Franco-Soviet military alliance in order to enable the Soviet Union to help these countries with war equipment. As the Minister for Coordination of Defence, Lord Chatfield, stated at the end of the meeting, "the general view of the committee appeared to be that the political arguments against a military alliance between this country, France and Russia" were "such as to outweigh any military advantages". The minutes of the meeting stated that "the Committee were not ... disposed to accept the Soviet proposal".⁴⁷

On April 24, the Chiefs of Staff of the three armed services of Britain produced a document *Military Value of Russia*. In their class hatred for the USSR, Britain's military top leadership deliberately distorted the true state of affairs. Having admitted that at the very outset of war, the Soviet Union could mobilise and field 130 divisions on its Western Front, they asserted at the same time that the country's economy could supply no more of war equipment than to keep in the field only 30 divisions.

The Chiefs of Staff sought to prove that some countries, because of their "deep-seated hostility to Communism" might deny the right of passage to the Soviet troops through their territory and that "may well nullify the value" of military co-operation with the USSR. Expressing their doubts regarding the offensive capability of Soviet troops and about the condition of Soviet railways, the

Chiefs of Staff arrived at the conclusion that any substantial Russian military support "is out of the question". The document asserted that the USSR would actually not be in a position to supply war equipment to Poland, Romania and Turkey either.

At the same time the document pointed out that co-operation between the USSR and Britain would be important in the sense that "Germany would be unable to draw upon Russia's immense reserves of food and raw materials". The Chiefs of Staff wrote that the rejection of the Soviet proposal might prompt an agreement between Germany and Russia.⁴⁸

Referring to this conclusion, it is necessary to point out right away that it was so biased that the Chiefs of Staff themselves, as will yet be shown, had subsequently to dissociate themselves from it, not to speak of the fact that the real potentialities of the USSR demonstrated during the war, completely disproved this inference.

Reporting on the following day the conclusions of the Chiefs of Staff at a meeting of the British government's Foreign Policy Committee, Lord Chatfield summed them up as follows: "Russia, although a Great Power for other purposes, was only a Power of medium rank for military purposes."⁴⁹

When the Soviet proposals were debated at the British Cabinet meeting on April 26, Lord Halifax objected to a "comprehensive" agreement with the USSR. The British Foreign Secretary's main argument was that for Britain and France to enter into alliance with the USSR would adversely affect Anglo-German relations, that is, would make impossible any fresh Anglo-German agreement which the British government considered to be its main preoccupation. The Soviet proposal was found unacceptable at that meeting.⁵⁰

Characterising the position taken up by the British government, the Chief of the Northern Department of the British Foreign Office, Laurence Collier, stated that the government did not wish to bind itself with the USSR, but wanted "to enable Germany to expand eastwards at Russian expense".⁵¹

In the meantime, Chamberlain kept on building his policy with an eye to a Soviet-German conflict. Should Britain have concluded an agreement with the USSR, that

would, to a certain extent, deter Germany from aggression against it. Therefore, the conclusion of a co-operation agreement with the USSR was at variance with the entire political strategy of the British government.

Although the widest sections of French public opinion were profoundly concerned over the course of events, the French government also did not show any real intention either to seek co-operation with the USSR. Following a conversation with the French Minister for Colonies, G. Mandel, Soviet Ambassador Surits reported from Paris on April 24 that the text of the Soviet proposal had not yet been brought to the knowledge of the Cabinet members. None of the ministers, except Bonnet and Daladier, had yet seen the draft. Two days later, Surits wrote that, apparently, all talks about "co-operation" with the USSR would "end in a common bluff" since Bonnet and Chamberlain had never desired such co-operation in real earnest.⁵²

Meanwhile the international situation was fast deteriorating. On April 28, Hitler announced the termination of the 1934 Polish-German declaration of non-aggression as well as the Anglo-German naval agreement of 1935. Maisky reported to Moscow in those days that there was strong anti-German feeling in Britain and that everybody was coming to recognise the need for resistance to aggression. "Hence, vast popularity of the idea of an alliance with the USSR among the masses. Each mention of such an alliance at political meetings and rallies up and down the nation is cheered to the echo."⁵³

Nevertheless, the British government still believed that the only fact of Britain, France and the USSR conducting any negotiations was enough to exercise certain pressure on Hitler to make him accept an Anglo-German agreement.

A reply to the Soviet proposal was discussed at a British Cabinet meeting on May 3. While expressing the hope that a way would still be found to come to terms with Hitler by leaving his hands free in the East, Halifax and other members of the government suggested that there should be no change in British policy. There was only some apprehension lest the Soviet government should be forced to agree to normalising its relations with Germany, because of the position held by Britain. True, that was found hardly probable but, nevertheless, to prevent Soviet-German relations from being normalised, it was found expedient "to keep

negotiations continuing for some further period".⁵⁴ Chatignon pointed out in his *Diaries* on the same day that Russia was to be snubbed, or rather let down lightly.⁵⁵

On May 8, the British Government once more turned to the USSR with the "offer" that the Soviet Government should *unilaterally* commit itself to providing assistance to Britain and France if they, in fulfilment of their commitments to some East European countries, found themselves involved in war.⁵⁶ The Soviet Union, naturally, did not find it possible to assume such a unilateral obligation.

The question of relations with the USSR was once more brought up for a discussion at a meeting of the British government's Foreign Policy Committee on May 16. The Chiefs of Staff submitted a new document. It now stated that an agreement of mutual assistance between Britain, France and the Soviet Union would offer "certain advantages. It would present a solid front of formidable proportions against aggression". On the contrary, if such an agreement was not concluded, that would be "a diplomatic defeat which would have serious military repercussions". If, rejecting an alliance with Russia, Britain were to prompt her to enter into an agreement with Germany, "we should have made a mistake of vital and far-reaching importance".⁵⁷

In the face of a manifestly growing threat of German aggression and, in particular of the intention, announced by Germany and Italy on May 7, to conclude a military alliance between themselves, the British Chiefs of Staff tended to adopt a more sober stand. Chamberlain, however, was still adamantly opposed to Britain assuming any obligations with respect to the USSR. He declared that, apart from the military and strategical considerations with which the Chiefs of Staff were concerned, there were political considerations, and they prompted "a different attitude". He was supported by Halifax who repeated the old theory that the political arguments against a treaty with the USSR were more important than the military considerations in favour of it.⁵⁸

In a conversation with his assistant Oliver Harvey, Halifax pointed out in those days that Chamberlain never wanted a full triple alliance by any means. Strang noted, in his turn, that the Prime Minister and his closest adviser Horace Wilson guided themselves by the principle that fol-

lowing the conclusion of a treaty with the USSR, it would be impossible to continue with the policy of appeasement, that is, to reach an accommodation with Germany. "All at No. 10 are anti-Soviet," Strang said.⁵⁹ That was confirmed by an entry of Alexander Cadogan in his *Diaries*: "The Prime Minister says he will resign rather than sign alliance with Soviets."⁶⁰ One of the partisans of the Anglo-German accommodation, Henry Channon, pointed out that Chamberlain and Halifax were decidedly opposed to an Anglo-Russian alliance. They were reluctant to embrace the Russian bear; it has now been decided "to hold out a hand and accept its paw gingerly. No more. The worst of both worlds".⁶¹

Enforced "Consent"

Meanwhile, British public opinion was increasingly worried. There was a heated foreign policy debate in the British House of Commons on May 19. Chamberlain's line came under scathing criticism from Lloyd George, Churchill, Attlee and some other MPs who called for the Anglo-Franco-Soviet agreement to be concluded at the earliest opportunity. Urging Britain's acceptance of the Soviet proposal, Churchill stressed that there could be no effective Eastern Front without the Soviet Union and without the effective Eastern Front, there could be no hope of defending Britain's interests in the West. If the Chamberlain government, he warned, "having thrown away Czechoslovakia with all that Czechoslovakia meant in military power, having committed us, without examination of the technical aspects, to the defence of Poland and Romania, now reject and cast away the indispensable aid of Russia," it would so lead Britain "in the worst of all wars".⁶²

Anglo-French diplomacy was quite disturbed by the news reaching the press on May 21, 1939, about a German trade delegation going to Moscow (the German government had, indeed, suggested sending a trade delegation to Moscow on May 20, but the Soviet government turned down the offer).

The signing of a German-Italian treaty of alliance ("The Steel Pact") on May 22, 1939, was a telling blow to Britain and France. The British and French governments indeed had something to worry about. On the following day,

May 23, Hitler called a conference of the Wehrmacht top chiefs to order effective preparations for war. He declared that "further successes can no longer be won without bloodshed". It was clear from Hitler's pronouncements that he was girding himself for war against Britain and France, but, to make sure of his starting position, considered it necessary "to attack Poland at the first suitable opportunity".⁶³

The Chamberlain government eventually had, against its will, to give its consent to the conclusion of an Anglo-Franco-Soviet agreement (which, unfortunately, was no more than a smokescreen, as the subsequent course of events showed). At the British Cabinet meeting on May 24, Lord Halifax admitted that a breakdown of the talks Britain and France were conducting with the USSR could induce Hitler to go to war and, therefore, he finally expressed himself in favour of accepting the Soviet proposal to conclude an Anglo-Franco-Soviet agreement. It was decided, however, there and then to hedge it in with a whole series of reservations which were to reduce the importance of the treaty virtually to naught. Chamberlain, having stressed that he had a keen sense of prejudice against anything that looked like an alliance with the USSR suggested linking the treaty with Article 16 of the Covenant of the League of Nations. This article, he said, would possibly be modified subsequently, so a reference to it made the treaty look provisional. He also objected to the treaty being concluded for a term of more than five years (although it was mentioned at the meeting that the German-Italian alliance had been signed for a term of 10 years). As for Halifax, he considered it necessary for the treaty also to stipulate that the contracting parties should first consult together before taking military action.⁶⁴ That gave Britain an opportunity to evade her treaty obligations under a "plausible" pretext.

Channon put down in his *Diaries* on the same day that the government had showed itself to be sly enough to link the treaty with the League of Nations thus rendering its new obligation quite meaningless, in point of fact. The projected agreement "is so flimsy, so unrealistic and so impractical that it will only make the Nazis poke fun at us".⁶⁵

On May 27, British Ambassador, Seeds and French Char-

g  d'Affaires, Payart advised Molotov who was appointed People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs early in May, of "the consent" of their governments to accept the Soviet proposal for concluding the Anglo-Franco-Soviet Treaty of Mutual Assistance, but hedged it in with the reservations just mentioned. The Soviet government realised perfectly well that those reservations reduced the treaty to a mere scrap of paper and said so in no uncertain terms to the British and French diplomats.⁶⁶ From then on the French government put forward no more proposals of its own at the talks, but limited itself to backing up Britain's position. There was hectic controversy in France about whether or not the treaty with the USSR should be concluded. Foreign Minister Bonnet was the most persevering opponent of the treaty, and the British policy of stalling the conclusion of the Anglo-Franco-Soviet treaty of mutual assistance in defence against aggression suited him perfectly well.

To hasten the negotiations and remedy the defects of the Anglo-French proposals the Soviet government passed a draft treaty of mutual assistance to the governments of Britain and France on June 2. It provided for immediate and all-round effective mutual assistance of the Three Powers in case of an attack on any one of them, and for them to render assistance to Belgium, Greece, Turkey, Romania, Poland, Finland and the Baltic states. The treaty of mutual assistance was to have come into effect simultaneously with a military convention.⁶⁷

The Soviet draft was examined at the meetings of the British government's Foreign Policy Committee on June 5 and 9. The essential meaning of the debate was that Britain should avoid assuming any particular commitments, including assistance to the Baltic states.⁶⁸

Back on June 10, the Soviet Ambassador in London was instructed to tell Halifax that it would be impossible for the negotiations between the USSR, Britain and France to be carried through without finding a fair solution to the question of guarantees for the Baltic states.⁶⁹ As Maisky reported to Moscow, Halifax, in a conversation with him on the subject, had to admit the "validity of our desire to have the guarantees of the Three Powers against direct or indirect aggression in respect of Latvia, Estonia and Finland".⁷⁰

That did not mean, however, that the British government was ready to meet the Soviet Union half-way on the subject. On the contrary, it proceeded from the assumption that German aggression against the Baltic states and Soviet resistance to it were one of what it considered to be perfectly suitable versions of the outbreak of an armed conflict between the Soviet Union and the Nazi Reich. Seeds noted in his cable to Halifax that the British proposals did not envisage an unreserved guarantee for the Baltic countries and that the appropriate point of these proposals contained "a loophole through which Great Britain and France might evade their obligations to assist the Soviet Union".⁷¹

The British and French governments would still not agree either to the simultaneous signing of political and military agreements.

Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Andrei Zhdanov had every reason to state in a *Pravda* article that the British and French governments did not want any equal treaty with the USSR and that they were dragging out the talks and saddling them with all kinds of artificial difficulties with regard to such matters which, given the good will and earnest intentions of Britain and France, could have been resolved without delay and hindrance. "It seems to me," Zhdanov stressed, "that what the British and the French want is not a real treaty acceptable to the USSR, but only talk about a treaty in order, by playing up the alleged Soviet intractability in front of the public opinion of their respective countries, to make it easier for themselves to strike a deal with the aggressors."⁷² That was strong, yet fair, as the facts showed, criticism of the British and French governments and a perfectly justified qualification of their respective positions.

On July 1, Britain and France finally gave their consent to the Three-Power guarantees being extended to the Baltic countries. They proposed, however, that the nations receiving such guarantees should be listed not in the treaty itself but in a protocol which was not subject to publication. In their opinion, the list of the countries concerned should include Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Turkey, Greece, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Switzerland.⁷³

At the same time, while the Anglo-French guarantees for

Poland and Romania covered both the contingency of direct and indirect aggression, Britain and France agreed to assist the Baltic countries only in the event of a direct armed attack against any of them. In case of indirect aggression, all they still agreed to was to consult together, which meant reserving an opportunity to evade affording assistance. Besides, in an effort to create more difficulties at the talks, the British and French ruling circles had now started an endless debate about the definition of "indirect aggression".

"Alternatives: to Break off the Negotiations or to Conclude a Limited Pact"

The minutes of the meetings held by the British government's Foreign Policy Committee in those days furnished striking evidence to show that the British ruling circles still had no desire to conclude an effective agreement with the USSR to oppose aggression. While the Soviet government had every intention of reaching a concrete and effective agreement as soon as possible⁷⁴, Halifax tabled an entirely different set of proposals at a meeting of the Foreign Policy Committee on July 4, 1939. He brought two alternatives before it:

- 1) to break off the negotiations, or
- 2) to conclude a limited pact.

Halifax suggested that the talks should not be broken off but he did not find it necessary to conclude a really effective pact with the USSR. To explain his position, he said that Britain's main objective in the negotiations with the USSR was to prevent it from establishing any links with Germany.⁷⁵

The proposals made by Halifax revealed the full depth of the abyss between the positions of the USSR and Britain. While the Soviet Union was in favour of a comprehensive effective agreement, the British Foreign Secretary found it impossible to go beyond a "limited pact", or, to be exact, beyond producing a mere scrap of paper.

As to Halifax's statement about what constituted the British government's "main objective" in the negotiations with the USSR at the time, it is in need of some explanation. To this end, we must throw a glance back to recall the events of the 1920s. British and French diplomacy were

doing everything possible in those years to set up a united bloc of capitalist countries to oppose, in every way, including the force of arms, the world's first socialist state. All those efforts proved futile largely because the Soviet government had succeeded in concluding the Rapallo Treaty with Germany in 1922 which made it impossible to create such a bloc and laid the ground for the two countries to build their extensive and mutually beneficial co-operation on until 1932. Soviet-German co-operation, which continued for a whole decade, was never forgotten by British and French imperialist quarters.

Once the Nazis came to power in Germany, the alignment of forces in Europe changed substantially, although not in every respect. The hostility of Britain's and France's reactionary ruling establishment towards the world's first socialist state did not subside in any way. But whereas in the 1920s they sought to draw Germany into their anti-Soviet bloc, now they were casting German fascism in the role of the major strike force in imperialism's struggle against the Soviet Union.

However, there was one particular circumstance which rather embarrassed both British and French statesmen in the summer of 1939: German imperialism, in making its plans for a war of aggression, intended to rout first its main opponent in the West, that is, France, and, only afterwards, to direct its war machine eastwards, against Russia, because it saw that to defeat her would be far more difficult. By early July, the British and French governments had plenty of information that, having defeated Poland, Germany planned to move her troops against France, rather than against the USSR.

Nor could London fail to draw certain conclusions from the fact that, in spite of all the attempts of the British government to reach agreement with Germany, the Nazis were avoiding it. In the meantime, it was receiving more and more information to indicate Berlin's interest in a reconciliation with the USSR.

Therefore, the British and the French governments were under no doubt any longer that they were running a huge risk by stalling the conclusion of a treaty with the USSR. They understood just as well that, should the Soviet government definitely find out that all of its attempts to come to agreement with Britain and France would end in failure,

it would have no reasonable option left beyond responding to Germany's overtures and accepting a way of normalising relations with her, that is, reverting to what had come to be known as the policy of Rapallo.

Chamberlain was, however, so much obsessed with his aspiration for an understanding with Nazi Germany that he was prepared to run any risk. At the same time, whenever the British government formulated yet another negative reply to Soviet proposals, the invariable question was: isn't this reply the last straw that would break the Soviet leaders' patience and won't it lead to a revival of the Treaty of Rapallo? Therefore, the British government, reluctant to conclude any effective agreement with the USSR, found it necessary to "continue negotiations" so as to prevent a possible normalisation of relations between Germany and the USSR.

At a British Cabinet meeting, Halifax pointed out that a rejection of Russia's proposal could push her into German arms. Secretary for War Hore-Belisha, sharing this apprehension, added: "Although the idea might seem fantastic at the moment, the natural orientation suggested an arrangement" between Germany and Russia. The Secretary of State for Dominions M. MacDonald added that in the event of war it would be serious if Russia were neutral and supplying Germany with food and raw materials.⁷⁶

To forestall the breakdown of the negotiations with the USSR, which had virtually reached a dead end, Halifax speaking at a meeting of the British government's Foreign Policy Committee on July 10, 1939, proposed consenting to political and military agreements being signed simultaneously and to open negotiations about the substance of the military agreement. Intimating that all he meant, however, was the idea of creating the conditions to enable "conversations for the sake of conversations" to be continued, Halifax remarked that "military conversations ... would drag on". Besides, the military agreement might well not have been very substantial in terms of its meaning. That was also the position of Chamberlain. The Minister for Co-ordination of Defence, Lord Chatfield, had to admit, however, that the Soviet government attached great importance to these military conversations, and wanted a detailed agreement to contain specific commitments for the parties to it.

Rounding off the discussion, Halifax repeated: "When the

military conversations had begun no great progress would be made. The conversations would drag on... In this way we should have gained time and made the best of a situation." The Committee approved the diplomatic move projected by Halifax.⁷⁷

The French government did not, however, accept the course indicated by London. It told the British that there would be serious difficulties during the military conversations because it would be necessary to obtain Poland's and Romania's consent to the transit of Soviet troops through their territories.⁷⁸

The British government still considered breaking off the negotiations with the USSR. As early as June 8, Chamberlain confessed in a conversation with U.S. Ambassador Kennedy that he was not at all sure that he would "not call off" the negotiations with the USSR.⁷⁹ Even in the conversation with Japanese Ambassador Shigemitsu late in June, Chamberlain did not conceal his "intimate desire to break off the conversations with the USSR".⁸⁰

From early July onwards, the question of breaking off the conversations was repeatedly discussed at the meetings of the British government's Foreign Policy Committee. On July 18 Halifax cynically declared that should the talks break down, "this would not cause him very great anxiety".⁸¹

The position of the British and French governments did condemn the Moscow talks to futility. The Soviet government was increasingly convinced that the British as well as the French government leaders in their footsteps had no real intention to bring the Moscow talks to a successful conclusion.

Writing to the Soviet ambassadors in Britain and France on July 17, Molotov said that the British and French politicians were "resorting to all kinds of tricks and unworthy subterfuges".⁸²

Considering the state of affairs at the conversations in his letter of July 20 to the Foreign Office, British diplomat William Strang who had arrived in Moscow to help Ambassador Seeds with them, pointed out that the Soviet government's distrust and suspicion regarding the British plans had not diminished. The fact, he wrote, that Britain had been raising difficulty after difficulty, had produced the Soviet government's impression that British diplomacy was

not seriously seeking an agreement. As to an eventual breakdown of the conversations, Strang believed that an "indeterminate situation" would be better than a "final breakdown of the negotiations now". He pointed out that Germany could avail herself of the breakdown of the negotiations to launch her aggression. Besides, the breakdown "might drive the Soviet Union into isolation or into composition with Germany". Therefore, Strang suggested military conversations which would, however, produce "no immediate concrete results".⁸³

The announcement published in Moscow in July 21 about the opening trade negotiations between the USSR and Germany prompted the British and the French to give their consent on July 23 to the simultaneous entry into force of the political and military agreements. Two days later, they announced their consent to start negotiations with a view to concerting the text of the military agreement.⁸⁴

All that did not mean at all, however, that London had finally decided to take a step forward. British and French diplomacy were still conducting nothing but "conversations for the sake of conversations" with the USSR. In particular, they were to serve as a means of bringing pressure to bear on Germany to induce the Nazis to give their consent eventually to an Anglo-German imperialist deal.

ANGLO-GERMAN IMPERIALIST PLOTING

British Outline of "General Settlement"

The British government considered that by having strengthened its bond with Poland and with some other states of Eastern Europe and having entered into negotiations with the USSR, it had sufficiently consolidated its position, and the time had now come for it once again to try and reach an amicable agreement with the Nazi Reich. The Polish Ambassador in London, E. Raczynski, wrote on June 8, 1939, after conferring with Chamberlain, that "the Premier means trying to reach agreement with Germany already from positions of 'strength rather than weakness'. He

would consider it disastrous to slam the door leading to agreement with Germany".⁸⁵

Back on May 3, Neville Chamberlain suggested at a Cabinet meeting that it was desirable to resume Anglo-German economic negotiations which had been suspended following Germany's take-over of Czechoslovakia. He went on to express his conviction that "Herr Hitler's heart was in Eastern Europe". Halifax, like Chamberlain, took the line that the only thing that Hitler was going to demand from Britain was a "free hand in Eastern Europe". In that context, Halifax suggested that the British government might avoid fulfilling its guaranteed commitments in respect of Poland. He pointed out that the guarantees would stand only if "Polish independence was clearly threatened", which gave Britain some right to exercise her own judgement on assistance to Poland. Chamberlain went along with Halifax in this issue.⁸⁶

British politician H. Nicolson recorded in his memoirs a very characteristic dialogue between two Tories—members of the British Parliament—on that subject:

"I suppose we shall be able to get out of this beastly guarantee business?"

"Oh, of course. Thank God, we have Neville."⁸⁷

The idea now was for co-operation of Britain and France with Nazi Germany to be established at the expense of Poland. The U.S. Chargé d'Affaires in France wrote to the State Department on June 24, 1939, that he had the impression that "a second Munich, this time at the expense of Poland, may be in the making". "The influences", he wrote, "which were at work in France and England in last September are coming to life again."⁸⁸

The attempts of the British ruling elements to come to terms with the Nazis were intensified particularly in the second half of July of 1939.

London decided to take advantage of the visit of Helmuth Wohlthat, a high-ranking official of the department headed by Göring, that was in charge of the four-year plan to prepare Germany's economy for war. Discussions between Chamberlain's closest adviser Horace Wilson and Wohlthat about Anglo-German co-operation took place on July 18 and 21, 1939. Wilson set out the foreign policy plans of Britain's ruling top leadership. He stressed the particular importance of preventing "an armed clash which might

develop far beyond ... Eastern Europe, into a new fundamental struggle between the groups led by Britain and Germany".

That was an unequivocal indication that Britain would not object to German aggression in Eastern Europe provided Germany gave assurances that she would not encroach on the interests of the British Empire.

Wilson then proposed a "programme for German-British co-operation" which he had previously formulated in a special memorandum and had it approved by Chamberlain. The Programme provided for:

"a joint Anglo-German declaration not to use aggression; mutual declarations of non-interference by Germany in respect of the British Commonwealth of Nations and by Great Britain in respect of Greater Germany; the Colonial and/or Mandates question; a German-British declaration on a fundamental revision of the relevant provisions of the Versailles Treaty".⁸⁹

R. Hudson declared, in a conversation with Wohlthat, that London regarded East Europe as a "natural economic sphere of Germany" and that "there were much wider possibilities". In that context, he mentioned Russia, China and the various colonial dependencies of European powers.⁹⁰

On August 3, Wilson disclosed the British plans also to the German Ambassador in London. Dirksen wrote to Berlin afterward that the British government's expectation as Wilson put it, was that "an Anglo-German agreement ... would completely absolve the British Government from the commitments to which it was now pledged by the guarantees to Poland, Turkey, etc. ..." ⁹¹

Many of the British government's 1939 documents have been declassified, but it has been decided in London to keep secret until the Year 2000 and even 2039 some of the most important ones regarding British policy on Germany. Evidently, there is something in them that has to be withheld from the public.

Georges Bonnet, French Minister for Foreign Affairs, was still a committed advocate of an accommodation with Germany. He told the German Ambassador in Paris, J. Welck that "in spite of everything," France "held fast to the idea of bringing back co-operation with Germany, to grow closer as time went on" and that he would never deviate from the main lines of his policy.⁹²

U.S. diplomatic representatives in the capitals of many European countries supported such plans wholly and entirely. The U. S. Ambassador in London, Joseph Kennedy, believed that the Poles should be left to themselves to make them accept an accommodation with Hitler which would "enable the Nazis to pursue their objectives in the East", leading to an armed conflict between the USSR and Germany "to the great benefit of the whole Western world".⁹³ The U.S. Ambassador in Berlin, Hugh Wilson, also found it the best way out if Germany ventured to "attack Russia, with the tacit consent" of the Western powers, "even with their approval".⁹⁴

Britain's and France's policy on Poland changed considerably since the spring of 1939 when they had given her their guarantees in the belief that a German occupation of Poland would have substantially weakened their own positions. Now they pinned virtually all their hopes on a deal with the Nazi Reich in the expectation that, with Poland smashed, the German forces would keep advancing eastward, that is, against the USSR, rather than turn westward, that is, against them. So, the U.S. Chargé d'Affaires in Paris wrote on June 24 that influential sources there considered that in the long run "France should abandon Central and Eastern Europe to Germany, trusting that eventually Germany will come into conflict with the Soviet Union."⁹⁵

Poland's Grave-Diggers

The fact that Poland figured first in the plans of German aggression for the summer of 1939 was no secret to any other country. The available documents indicate that the Polish ruling circles, too, were aware of the Wehrmacht's preparations for an attack on Poland.⁹⁶ Should they have built their policy on Poland's real national interest, they ought to have made their utmost towards creating in Europe a powerful united front of nations anxious to prevent war and check the German aggressors. And there is no doubt that Poland, given her good will, could have played a role of no mean importance in pooling the efforts of the countries concerned, all the more so since she was already in alliance with France, Britain and Romania.

The Soviet Union repeatedly offered Poland its co-opera-

tion and assistance in opposing aggression. It is particularly worthwhile recalling in this context V. P. Potemkin's mission to Warsaw in May 1939. In a conversation with J. Beck on May 10 he said that "the USSR would not refuse aid to Poland should she desire it".⁹⁷ However, on the following day the Polish Ambassador in Moscow, W. Grzybowski, called on Molotov and declared that Poland did not wish any Anglo-Franco-Soviet guarantees and "does not consider it possible to conclude a pact of mutual assistance with the USSR".⁹⁸

On May 25, 1939, the Soviet Ambassador in Poland, N. I. Sharonov, once more told J. Beck: "We, of course, would be ready to help, but in order to help tomorrow, we must be ready today, that is, we must know beforehand about the need to help."⁹⁹ But Beck left this statement unanswered.

The Polish rulers still nurtured the hope that they would somehow reach an understanding with the Nazi Reich and that German aggression, leaving Poland untouched, would turn against the USSR. That calculation accounted for Poland's continued extremely unfriendly policy with respect to the USSR even in the context of 1939. Not only did the Polish government flatly refuse to accept Soviet aid in case of a German attack, but it was doing everything it could to prevent the successful completion of the Anglo-Franco-Soviet negotiations. It expected that should Poland keep up an alliance with Britain and France, while the USSR would have no agreement with them, that would encourage the Nazis to attack the Soviet Union, rather than Poland.¹⁰⁰

J. Beck also intimated to the Nazis several times that he was looking forward to an early composition of the German-Polish differences, and said that Poland was willing to yield a good deal of ground to that end. Poland's Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs M. Arcizewski declared to the German Ambassador in Warsaw, H. Moltke, in May that J. Beck "would be prepared to come to terms with Germany had there been any way to prevent that looking like a surrender". Beck attached great importance to this, he went on to say, as evidenced by the "restraint Poland is exercising in respect of the negotiations about a pact between the West and the Soviet Union".¹⁰¹

The Polish rulers proceeded from the assumption that

Germany's first target was Danzig and they were prepared to meet the Nazi demand in this sense. The German government, striving as it did to strain relations with Poland, rather than normalise them, left such appeals unheeded. The more so since all of British subsequent offers of co-ordination convinced Germany that in the event of an attack on Poland, it would have no reason to fear any intervention by Britain and France. As has been established by documentary evidence, that is precisely the conclusion that Hitler had drawn from Wohlthat's report about his conversations in London and other similar facts. For instance, Germany's Air Attaché in Poland A. Gerstenberg on a visit to Berlin early in August 1939, said: "We shall be at war with Poland before this year is out. I know from a perfectly reliable source that Hitler had so decided. After Wohlthat's visit to London, Hitler is convinced that Britain will remain neutral in the event of such a conflict."¹⁰²

Speaking before Wehrmacht chiefs, Hitler declared: "I experienced those poor worms Daladier and Chamberlain in Munich. They will be too cowardly to attack. They won't go beyond a blockade."¹⁰³ Anglo-French policy convinced the Nazis that they could attack Poland without fear of any full-scale military action by Britain and France.

NEGOTIATIONS OF MILITARY MISSIONS OF THE USSR, BRITAIN AND FRANCE

London and Paris Prefer Talking to Business

The world was fast drifting to war. London and Paris knew that Hitler had decided to attack Poland, that a mobilisation was under way in Germany, and that she was quite ready to open hostilities at the end of August. The Soviet government likewise had rather complete and precise information about the military plans and preparations of the Nazis.¹⁰⁴

Although the British government did, finally, accept, on July 25, 1939, the Soviet proposal for negotiations of military representatives of the USSR, Britain and France, that did not mean at all, as stated earlier on, that Chamberlain

had, indeed, decided to agree on co-operation with the USSR. One characteristic fact was that British and French military representatives had taken 17 days to reach Moscow. Military conversations could not start until August 12.

The very composition of the British and French military missions showed that Britain's and France's attitude to these negotiations was not serious. At a meeting of the British government's Foreign Policy Committee on July 10, the Minister for Coordination of Defence Lord Chatfield suggested that military conversations would have to be conducted on the level of Deputy Chiefs of Staff because of their complexity.¹⁰⁵ However, military representatives that were ultimately sent to Moscow were of a far lower rank. The British delegation was led by Admiral Drax. Even Lord Strang had to admit in his recollections that the British government had not wanted to conclude any military agreement with the USSR. That was why a military mission of an "inadequate standing" with instructions of a "limiting character" was sent to Moscow.¹⁰⁶

The French military mission, led by General Doumenc, member of the French Supreme Council, produced no better impression. The Soviet Ambassador to France, Surits, reporting the make-up of the French mission to Moscow, said it showed that the French government must have set a "modest programme" for it to work on.¹⁰⁷

Information now made public about the instructions which had been given to the British and French military delegations bore out this assessment.

The British delegation's instruction had been examined at a British Cabinet meeting on July 26. It is worth pointing out that the minutes of that meeting contained not a single word about Britain's interest in the successful completion of the negotiations and in the signing of an effective military convention. That put it beyond all doubt that the British government had not set itself such a task at all. Halifax confined himself to noting in his speech that the opening of the military conversations would have a good effect on world opinion.¹⁰⁸ So the only concern of the British government was to mislead both the Soviet government and British public opinion, while trying to reach an understanding with the Nazi Reich (that was just the time when Wilson's above-stated proposals to the Nazi emissar Wohlbath had been made).

The debate on this issue at the Cabinet meeting predetermined the instruction to be given to the British military mission. The instruction stated, for example: "The British government is unwilling to enter into any detailed commitments which are likely to tie our hands in all circumstances." Although the political discussions had been suspended as early as August 2 (William Strang returned to London) and the British government did not propose to take any initiative towards their resumption, the British military delegation was instructed until they were over to "go very slowly" with the military conversations.¹⁰⁹ That was how the British diplomacy created a "vicious circle" at the talks.

All the British government still intended to conduct with the USSR was "conversations for the sake of conversations". Referring to the object of these "conversations", Halifax pointed out that "so long as the military conversations were taking place, we should be preventing" a rapprochement between Germany and the USSR.¹¹⁰

Neither did the instructions to the French military mission provide for an effective military convention to be concluded. All referred to was a set of items of secondary importance, as the lines of communication with the USSR, or action in the Baltic against the German sea routes.¹¹¹ Naturally, such instructions were utterly inadequate for the talks to be conducted successfully and for a military convention to be concluded.

British general H. Ismay, having studied these instructions, wrote: "The document strikes me as being couched in such general terms as to be almost useless as a brief: it deals solely with what the French wish the Russians to do, and throws no light on what the French will do." When, talking to the French generals Jamet and Doumenc, Ismay asked what the French proposed to say about the contribution of France and Britain, Jamet "smiled and shrugged his shoulders", and Doumenc said: "Very little. I shall just listen."¹¹²

Once informed of the instructions to Drax, Ambassador Seeds could not but come to the conclusion that they meant creating a hopeless deadlock at the talks which would be immediately obvious to the Soviet government, too. There is no doubt, he wrote to London on August 13, that under such conditions the "military talks are likely to produce no

result beyond arousing once again Russian fears that we are not in earnest, and are not trying to conclude a concrete and definite agreement".¹¹³

The principal objective of the British military mission was to keep on creating a semblance of negotiating until autumn rains which, as British military experts believed, would make Germany's attack on Poland virtually impossible. Thereupon, the negotiations with the USSR were to have been suspended in the hope of overtaking the Nazi Reich in the arms race to some extent until the subsequent spring and also coming to terms with it on a division of the spheres of influence. The Director-General of the British Territorial Army, General W. Kirke, declared that by that spring Britain would have become strong enough militarily "not to need any more Russian help".¹¹⁴ Ambassador Seeds also noted in one of his letters to London that the military conversations "might be prolonged sufficiently" to tide over the nearest dangerous period.¹¹⁵ The Foreign Office even informed the U.S. Embassy in London that the British military mission "has been told to make every effort to prolong its discussions until October 1."¹¹⁶ A member of the French military mission in Moscow General Beaufre and the French Ambassador in Warsaw pointed out in their recollections that the British government was concerned, above all, with gaining time in the military conversations.¹¹⁷

The British plans became known to the Nazis as well. For example, the German Ambassador in Moscow, von Schulenburg, cabled to Berlin to say that he had been informed by British military sources that "from the very start the military missions were under instruction to go slow in Moscow and to drag out the conversations until October, if possible".

It was understood perfectly well in London and Paris that the central problem in the negotiations would be that of the passage of Soviet troops through the territory of Poland to engage the German troops. The Soviet government, as has been shown earlier on, had raised the matter back in 1937 and also in 1938 in connection with possible Soviet assistance to Czechoslovakia. The same issue was raised by the French, too, in their note of July 11, 1939, to Britain. William Strang reminded Halifax of that problem on July 20 just when the British government was draw-

ing up the instruction to its delegation at the military conversations. "The military negotiations will probably not be brought to a conclusion," Strang wrote, "until it can be agreed, for example, between the Soviet Union and Poland that the Soviet Union will have passage through at any rate a section of Polish territory in the event of a war in which Poland is involved on our side."¹¹⁸

However, no steps were suggested either by the British or by the French government towards resolving the issue.

The British government had virtually brought the political discussions into an impasse by the stand it had taken on guarantees for other nations in the event of indirect aggression. As far as the military conversations were concerned, it did want to have them deadlocked on the issue of passage for Soviet troops through the territory of Poland. Besides, London was striving to put the blame for the breakdown of the talks on the Polish government because its abstractionist position furnished enough reason for doing so.

One cannot fail to note that having dispatched their military mission off to Moscow with an instruction that doomed the talks to failure, all British ministers (that is, the British government as a whole) went on holiday, by tradition, early in August. And that at a time when London knew that Nazi Germany contemplated an attack on Poland before they would be back from their holiday! Just as there is a notion of "diplomatic sickness" in historical vocabulary, so there is ample reason to speak of the British government's "diplomatic holiday". The whole point was this: how could the British government be reproached with having failed to offer any resistance to German aggression when it was on its statutory holiday? All that meant that the British government was not proposing to make any change in the instruction to its military mission even if Nazi Germany really decided to attack Poland at the end of August, as planned (which was well known to London).

The Soviet Union's attitude to the military conversations was quite different. On August 2, 1939 the composition of the Soviet military delegation was endorsed by People's Commissar for Defence Marshal K. Y. Voroshilov.

The General Staff of the Soviet Armed Forces had prepared a detailed plan of military co-operation of the Three Powers in time for the talks. That was a clear indication of

the Soviet government's keen interest in bringing the talks to conclusion as soon as possible and thereby preventing the Nazis from starting the war.

At the same time the Soviet side could not help being alerted by the true intentions of the British and French governments. So one objective the Soviet military delegation had to achieve was to find out these intentions of the British and French missions so as to avoid being misled.

The Soviet-British-French conversations opened in Moscow on August 12, 1939. The head of the Soviet military mission, Voroshilov, proposed, first of all that they should open with a statement of the powers the delegation had. Those of the Soviet representatives were full and comprehensive. However, it turned out that the head of the French delegation, Doumenc, was authorized only to negotiate, but not to sign any agreements. Drax had arrived in Moscow without any powers at all (he had to declare that he would ask for them and present them subsequently).

When the discussions on the substance of the matter opened, the head of the Soviet military mission asked the British and the French to state their proposals regarding the steps which, in their opinion, should assure a joint organisation of defence by the contracting parties, that is, Britain, France and the Soviet Union. "Do the missions of Britain and France have appropriate military plans?" Voroshilov asked. The head of the Soviet military delegation underlined that the Three Powers had to work out a joint military plan to meet the contingency of aggression. "This plan must be discussed in detail," he said, "so we must come to agreement, sign a military convention and go home to wait for the course the events will take, sure of our own strength."¹¹⁹

It turned out that the British and French delegations had arrived in Moscow without any detailed plans of military co-operation of the Three Powers. That fact could not, of course, fail to alert the Soviet delegation no less than the absence of the requisite powers.

What the head of the French delegation general Doumenc announced at the talks on August 13 had nothing to do with France's real plans and intentions. As stated earlier on, the Western powers had agreed between them long in advance that, in the event of war, they would stick to purely defensive tactics, pinning their greatest hopes on

a blockade. Doumenc, however, asserted that the French Army, 110 divisions strong, would, having first checked enemy advance on its line of fortifications, "concentrate its forces in places convenient for tank and artillery action and then go over to a counter-offensive". Should, however, the bulk of the Nazi forces be channelled eastwards, France "will throw all of her forces into an offensive against the Germans."¹²⁰ That statement was a premeditated attempt at misleading the Soviet government.

British General Heywood announced that Britain had as few as five infantry divisions and one motorised division at the time.¹²¹ This statement signified that in the event of war Britain virtually intended to keep out.

Cardinal Issue

At the session of the talks on August 13, Voroshilov asked how the military missions and General Staffs of France and Britain visualised the Soviet Union's involvement in a war against the aggressor, should the latter have attacked France, Britain, Poland, Romania or Turkey. He explained that he put the question that way because Soviet involvement in war was possible, owing to its geographical position, only on the territory of neighbouring states, above all Poland and Romania.¹²² The conversations of August 14 dealt with the same problem. The head of the Soviet military mission emphasised that this was the "cardinal issue" of the conversations. He specified that he meant passage of Soviet troops through some limited areas of Poland, namely the Vilno Corridor in the north and Galicia in the south. The Soviet military mission declared that "without a positive solution to this issue, the whole of the enterprise undertaken with a view to concluding a military convention between Britain, France and the USSR is doomed to failure in advance, in its opinion".

Voroshilov told the conferees and showed on the map how the USSR could take part in a common struggle against the aggressor with its armed forces. Having heard him produce that information, Doumenc exclaimed: "That will be the final victory".¹²³

As to the question raised by the Soviet delegation, Doumenc, avoiding a straightforward answer, pointed out that

Poland, Romania and Turkey had to defend their own territory with their own forces, while the Three Powers must be ready to come to their assistance "when they ask for it". In that context, the head of the Soviet delegation pointed out that Poland and Romania could just as well fail to ask for aid in good time, but surrender. It was, however, not in the interest of Great Britain, France and the Soviet Union to see "additional armed forces of Poland and Romania destroyed". So it was necessary to agree in advance on the involvement of Soviet forces in the defence of those countries against aggression.¹²⁴

The Soviet delegation, therefore, raised an issue which was crucial to Soviet active involvement in the struggle against the common enemy. Although Britain and France understood that perfectly well, they had taken no steps whatsoever towards settling the issue.

The position of Britain and France showed that there was, in effect, no ground for agreement between the Three Powers. "I think our mission is finished," Drax noted after that session.¹²⁵ The French military mission also stated in its diary that the session held on that day "having been of a rather dramatic character, marked the end of the current conversations".¹²⁶

The Soviet government could not, naturally, help drawing similar conclusions and, thus, there was every reason for it to arrive at the conclusion after the session of August 14 that *actually there was no hope any more for agreement to be reached.*

At the opening of the session on August 15, Drax announced that the British and French military missions had relayed the Soviet statement to their governments and were now waiting for a reply to it. In this context, the Soviet delegation agreed to continue the discussions.

The military quarters of Britain and France realised the danger the breakdown of the talks spelled. They were well informed that the projected Nazi attack on Poland was just a few days away. On August 16, the Foreign Office inquired about the judgement of the Deputy Chiefs of Staff of the three services of the British Armed Forces. The reply came on the same day. Unlike their earlier statements which had played down the importance of co-operation with the USSR, this document said: "We feel that this is no time for half-measures and that every effort should be

made to persuade Poland and Romania to agree to the use of their territory by Russian forces... It is perfectly clear that without early and effective Russian assistance, the Poles cannot hope to stand up to a German attack on land or in the air for more than a limited time... The conclusion of a treaty with Russia appears to us to be the best way of preventing a war... At the worst, if the negotiations with Russia break down, a Russo-German rapprochement may take place."¹²⁷

However, this conclusion was not even examined by the British government, nor were any steps taken in this respect.

The French Chief of Staff, General Gamelin, produced his own judgement as well. He declared that France's inaction could have disastrous consequences for her. Control of Poland would materially strengthen Germany. Should Poland get support, she would be in a position to resist long enough to keep Germany from throwing her forces into action against France in 1939.¹²⁸

Soviet Plan for Military Co-operation

The plan for Three-Power military co-operation, worked out in every detail by the Soviet side, was set out at the Anglo-Franco-Soviet military talks on August 15 by B. M. Shaposhnikov, Chief of the General Staff of the Red Army. He announced that the USSR was prepared to field 136 divisions, 5,000 heavy guns, 9,000-10,000 tanks and 5,000-5,500 combat aircraft against the aggressor.

In the report he presented, Shaposhnikov suggested three versions of joint action by the armed forces of the USSR, Britain and France in the subsequent variations of aggressive action by Germany: aggressors' attack on Britain and France; attack on Poland and Romania; and attack on the USSR through the Baltic region.¹²⁹

Doumenc cabled to Paris after the session that the Soviet representatives had set out plans of "very effective assistance they are determined to afford us". In another cable, he reported the Soviet Union's willingness to undertake offensive action in support of France should the main strike be directed against her. "In short," he wrote, "we have to

acknowledge a clearly expressed desire not to stay out, but, just on the contrary, to act in earnest." 130

Referring to the Soviet proposals, a member of the French delegation, General Beaufre, pointed out: "It would have been difficult to be more concrete and more clear... The contrast between this programme... and the confused abstractions of the Franco-English project is amazing, and it shows the gap between the two conceptions... The Soviet arguments carried weight... Our position was false." 131

The plan of military co-operation set forth by Shaposhnikov attested to the Soviet government's earnest intentions. In the event of war being started by the Nazi aggressors, the Soviet Union was prepared to act together with Britain and France in a determined operation to defeat the aggressor within the shortest space of time and with the least casualties. The main thing, however, was that should the Soviet-proposed agreement have been concluded, the aggressor would not have ventured to go to war.

The proposals of the Soviet government conclusively disprove the allegations circulated in the West to the effect that Moscow was dreaming of a war between the two groups of imperialist powers. Such contentions had nothing to do with the real state of things. The Soviet government realised perfectly well that neither Poland, nor France, nor both, would have been in a position, without Soviet aid, to stand up against the onslaught of Nazi Germany. Nor did it have any doubt that, having routed those two countries, the Nazis would throw their full strength against the USSR. As stated earlier on, it was in the spring of 1939 that the Soviet government received information that the Nazis were planning to crush Poland already in that year, to defeat France in 1940, and, then, launch a war against the USSR. That alone made it clear that the Soviet Union had to, and did strive to forestall Germany's attack on Poland and France for the sake of its own security: the defeat of those two countries was, in effect, sure to make it impossible to prevent the Nazi Reich's subsequent attack on the USSR. And, conversely, had the Nazis been stopped from overrunning Poland and France, there would have been less danger of Germany attacking the Soviet Union.

There was, however, no reply either on August 15 or 16, or 17 to the Soviet delegation's question about the passage

of Soviet troops through the territory of Poland and Romania. Thereupon, the conversations were adjourned until August 21, on a motion from Drax. The only thing that meant was that the governments of Britain and France, far from being in any hurry to bring off the talks, were holding them up advisedly. The Soviet government, naturally, could not see the situation thus created as anything but a sign of the utter futility of the talks.

Should the governments of Britain and France have really wanted to arrive at an agreement with the USSR, they should have settled the issue of Soviet-Polish military co-operation with the government of Poland even before the Moscow talks started. When, however, the matter arose in its full dramatic meaning in Moscow, the British and the French ought, it would seem, to have taken most urgent steps to get it settled. Since, however, what the governments of Britain and France were preoccupied with was not to conclude an agreement with the USSR but just to drag the talks on as long as possible, they were in no hurry to turn to the Polish government, still less get it to agree to military co-operation with the USSR. Incidentally, while they did, after all, establish some contact with the Polish government at long last, they never so much as addressed the government of Romania.

Poland's Part in Breaking Off the Talks

The contact which Britain and France established with the Polish government in those days was of a very peculiar character. For example, the French representatives in Warsaw showed no intention at all to get the Polish government to agree to co-operation with the USSR in action against German aggression, but just wanted to get the right for themselves to make a statement in Moscow about Poland's position which would enable the Three-Power military conversations to continue without in any way committing Poland. The member of the French delegation in Moscow, Beaufre, subsequently pointed out that the problem was not to secure a Polish reply to the question of whether or not they would allow passage of Soviet troops through their territory but to "find a pretext to continue the talks." 132

With the Nazi Reich's attack on Poland only a few days away, the Polish ruling circles still flatly refused all co-operation with the USSR because of their flagrantly anti-Soviet position. The French War Ministry stated in a memorandum about the progress of negotiations in Moscow: to make it easier for Poland to decide in favour of military co-operation with the USSR, the Soviet delegation very neatly limited the zone of passage of Soviet troops through Polish territory and determined them out of considerations of "purely strategic character". However, Jozef Beck and the Polish Chief of Staff General Stachiewicz, showed "irreconcilable hostility".¹³³ On August 20, 1939, Stachiewicz told the British military attaché that "there could never be any question of Soviet troops being allowed to cross the Polish frontier".¹³⁴ All the Polish government quarters consented to was the pretext suggested by French diplomacy.

Such a position of the Polish rulers will be easier to understand if one takes into account the fact that they, as has since been made clear by the reminiscences of the Polish Ambassador in Berlin, Józef Lipski, were still obsessed in those crucial days with their own plans of reaching an accommodation with the Nazi Reich. On August 18, Lipski suggested to Beck the idea of a visit to Berlin to negotiate with the Nazi chiefs. Beck agreed on the following day. On August 20, Lipski flew to Warsaw on an urgent mission to talk over with Beck the substance of the coming negotiations.¹³⁵

The Polish rulers could hardly have any doubt about the character those "talks" might have and what they might end up in. For everybody still remembered only too well the similar "talks" between Hitler and President Hácha of Czechoslovakia in Berlin in the middle of March 1939. The Führer is known to have forced him into "agreeing to a dismemberment of Czechoslovakia and the establishment of a Nazi Reich's protectorate out of what would be left of her by threatening to wipe Prague off the face of the earth. The Polish rulers could not fail to realise that at a time when the Nazi Reich had massed its troops close to the Polish borders in order to carry out a devastating strike against her, something like it was bound to be imposed on Poland in the negotiations in Berlin. But they, evidently, were ready and willing to capitulate in the hope of becoming Hitler's lieutenants in the Poland he would

enslave, as a result of this betrayal of their own people.

Hitler, however, was not at all disposed to have any negotiations with Poland's representatives. He was not to be satisfied even with her voluntary surrender. He had brought off his preparations for a military defeat of Poland and he wanted no other solution to the issue.

Britain and France Deadlock the Talks

The British government, wishing no agreement with the USSR and anxious to put the blame for the breakdown of the military conversations on Poland, did not even try to convince the Polish rulers in anything. The German troops were poised in readiness for yet another breakthrough eastward, not westward, so the British ruling establishment saw no particular reason to worry. While the alliance with the USSR "was essential to France from the military point of view", Beaufre pointed out, since it was the "only means" of preventing war, for the British and French governments the negotiations with the Soviet Union were nothing but a means to achieve their true diplomatic and strategic ends. As he stated these ends, Beaufre wrote that during the talks Britain and France were thinking of a "possible German-Soviet clash".¹³⁶

The way London saw that clash can be judged from some pronouncements of the British military attaché in Moscow, Firebrace, about the views the British military mission guided itself by at the negotiations: "In the coming war Germany would remain on the defensive in the West, attack Poland with superior forces and probably overrun her within one to two months. German troops would then be on the Soviet frontier shortly after the outbreak of war. It was not out of the question that Germany would then offer the Western Powers a separate peace on condition that she received a free hand to advance in the East."¹³⁷

There was no reply to the cardinal question raised by the Soviet government until August 21, which had been fixed in advance for the next session of talks by the military delegations of the Three Powers. Moreover, the British and French missions attempted to get the session postponed again. And at the time when Hitler Germany's attack on

Poland was scheduled for August 25-26 about which the British government had "a good deal of information".¹³⁸

Nonetheless the Soviet military mission did not agree to the session being postponed, so it did take place. Voroshilov addressed it with a statement that, in the absence of any reply from Britain and France to the cardinal question he had raised, "there is every reason to doubt their desire for real and serious military co-operation with the USSR. In view of the foregoing, the responsibility for the procrastination of the military conversations as well as for the suspension of these negotiations lies, naturally, with the French and British sides."

In view of the situation that had shaped up at the talks, the head of the Soviet delegation had to admit that there was, indeed, no more practical reason to meet again before the replies from the British and French governments were available. In case they would be affirmative, he declared, "we would have to call our conference as soon as possible".¹³⁹ That was the last session because the British and French missions never received any affirmative reply from their governments to the Soviet question.

Yet there was an epilogue on August 22 to the negotiations arising from the earlier-stated pretext regarding the position of Poland. Doumenc sent a letter to Voroshilov informing him that he had received from the French government "permission to give the affirmative answer to the question put by the Soviet delegation".¹⁴⁰

Still when he called on Voroshilov on the same day, Doumenc turned out to be unable to say anything reasonable either about the position of France or about Poland or Romania. He could not even say whether or not his own communication had been agreed with the Polish government. Voroshilov pointed out in this context that if the Polish government had given its consent to the passage of Soviet troops through the territory of Poland, it must have certainly wished to take part in the negotiations. He stressed that what was required was an answer from Britain and France in agreement with the governments of Poland and Romania. "When complete clarity has been established and all the replies have been received, then we will work,"¹⁴¹ Voroshilov concluded.

The governments of Britain and France, as well as of Poland were, therefore, responsible for the failure of the

military conversations in Moscow. Both the very course of the talks and the attitude of the governments of the Western powers to them quite clearly demonstrated that even within a few days of the outbreak of the war, Britain and France were still building their policies on the hope that they could reach an understanding with Berlin.

The U.S. Secretary of the Interior, Harold Ickes, describing Britain's political course at the time, pointed out in his *Diaries* that Britain could have come to agreement with the USSR long before that, but she "kept hoping against hope that she could embroil Russia and Germany with each other and thus escape scot-free herself".¹⁴²

The Western powers could not, however, make the events take the course they wanted. The aggressive powers—Germany, Japan and Italy—had thrown the gauntlet to them and openly set out to redraw the map of the world to their advantage. Co-operation of Britain and France with the USSR could have stopped the aggressors. But the West rejected the Soviet proposals for such co-operation. The policy of the ruling circles of the Western powers was built on shaky ground. The peoples had to pay dear for that policy.¹⁴³

JAPAN FANS THE FLAMES OF WAR

The Chinese People Aided Only by the USSR in Their Struggle Against Japanese Aggression

The situation in the Far East, too, went on deteriorating. The Japanese imperialists were overrunning more and more of China, trying to establish their domination through the land. Along the military measures, they resorted to some diplomatic moves to force China's governing quarters into surrender. Yet under pressure from the mass of the people who were up in arms determined to resist the aggression, the Chinese government continued to oppose the Japanese, albeit hesitatingly.

None of China's appeals to the Western powers for aid still fetched any response. In that context, the Chinese people were particularly anxious to get assistance from the Soviet Union.

The Soviet government invariably supported China whenever the Japanese aggression was discussed in the League of Nations. On January 11, 1939, Litvinov wrote to the Soviet Ambassador in France, Surits, who was appointed to represent the USSR at the session of the League's Council, that the Chinese representative Wellington Koo would be "somewhat active" at it. "You will, of course," the letter pointed out, "support Koo's proposal... Encourage him, promise him all possible assistance. It is necessary to find out in advance the position of the British and the French and should they, indeed, show themselves willing to take more resolute action against Japan, we will not be found wanting".¹⁴⁴ At the League's session which opened soon afterwards, the Soviet delegation once more went on record with all determination for effective assistance to China.

On June 13, 1939, the Soviet Union granted China one more large credit (worth 150 million U.S. dollars) for the purchase of war equipment. That credit sufficed China to get over 300 Soviet aircraft, 500 guns, 5,700 machine guns, 50,000 rifles, 850 lorries and tractors, as well as a large number of bombs, shells, cartridges, fuel and lubricants and other war equipment.¹⁴⁵

Japanese Aggressors Defeated at Khalkhin-Gol

Right after the defeat of the Japanese forces at Lake Khasan in August 1938, Tokyo decided to launch a well-prepared invasion of some Eastern regions of the Mongolian People's Republic in the spring of 1939.¹⁴⁶ Early in May, the Japanese General Staff received the Emperor's order to undertake military operations against the Mongolian People's Republic in the area of the Khalkhin-Gol River.¹⁴⁷ Soon afterwards, the first few Japanese army contingents invaded Mongolian territory, but were thrown back.

The Soviet government came out in support of the Mongolian People's Republic. On May 19, V. M. Molotov having summoned Japanese Ambassador Shigemitsu made a serious warning to him. He reminded him of the Soviet-Mongolian pact of mutual assistance.¹⁴⁸ Speaking at a session of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on May 31, 1939, Molotov declared: "We shall defend the border of the Mon-

golian People's Republic—in virtue of the Treaty of Mutual Assistance we have concluded—with as much determination as we would our own border."¹⁴⁹

It soon became obvious that the Japanese intended to seize a slice of Mongolian territory. The Soviet Union lost no time in coming to the aid of its ally. A big Soviet army contingent was sent to the Mongolian People's Republic. Bitter fighting went on between the Soviet-Mongolian and Japanese troops for several months. One idea of the scale of that fighting is provided by the fact that the Japanese Air Force lost 646 planes in air battles and on the airfields from May to September.¹⁵⁰ Within two months, July and August 1939, the enemy lost 18,868 officers and men killed and 25,900 wounded.¹⁵¹

Having launched a full-scale counter-offensive on August 20, the Soviet Armed Forces, in co-operation with the Mongolian troops, dealt a devastating blow at the aggressors. By the end of August the whole of Mongolian territory had been cleared from Japanese and Manchurian invaders. The USSR demonstrated its loyalty to its allied commitments.

The defeat of the Japanese and Manchurian troops on the Khalkhin-Gol River did not, however, signify the end of the armed conflict. The Japanese aggressors did not want to resign themselves to the defeat and to cease military operations. The Japanese government decided that in the event of war between the USSR and Germany, Japan would be prepared to take part automatically in it.¹⁵²

The Soviet government was informed of that decision. So the situation on the Soviet Far Eastern frontiers remained extremely tense. The USSR was faced by a grave danger of war breaking out both on its Western and Eastern borders.

SOVIET-GERMAN NON-AGGRESSION PACT

Soviet diplomacy was doing all it could to create a collective front to safeguard peace against aggression. It believed that peace in Europe could still be preserved by joint efforts of all the nations keen on preventing German aggression. Unfortunately, those efforts by the Soviet government were not crowned with success because of the policies of Britain and France.

The USSR remained, in point of fact, in international isolation in which it had found itself in the autumn of 1938 as a result of the Munich deal of Britain and France with German and Italian aggressors. Moreover, the Soviet Union had to take into account the fact that in the event of a German attack, it could be attacked also by certain of its western neighbours, as well as by Japan. So the Soviet state found itself face to face with a threat of war on two fronts. Besides, there was a danger of an anti-Soviet collusion of the entire imperialist camp.

The most important task before the Soviet diplomacy was to forestall such a war. Since general peace and security could not be assured through the fault of Britain, France, the United States and some other countries, Soviet diplomacy had to do everything possible to limit the spread of German aggression and to keep the USSR as long as possible from being involved in war. It had to take steps to prevent the Soviet Union finding itself in a state of war in the West and in the East at once under extremely disadvantageous international conditions.

German Nazis Fearful of War with the USSR

Ever since the opening days of 1939, the German government began to show interest in normalising relations with the USSR in some way. As one can see from utterances of Hitler and German military spokesmen, the Soviet Union was the only power whom Nazi Germany really feared to get into conflict with, and with whose position she reckoned.

Intent on channelling German aggression against the USSR the bourgeois propaganda machinery of the Western powers kept harping on the weakness of the Red Army and the fragility of the Soviet home front. Bourgeois newspapers kept claiming that the USSR was a giant with feet of clay. They sought to convince Hitler that he would quite easily make short shrift of the Soviet Union. It must be noted at this point, however, that they did not succeed in convincing Hitler and it was the ruling circles of the Western powers themselves that fell for these tales. Lord Halifax claimed at a meeting of the British government's Foreign Policy

Committee on July 4, that "Hitler rated Russia low from the military point of view".¹⁵³ Hence, the natural conclusion: Nazi Germany will go East. Subsequently the British people had to pay in blood for the wishful thinking Chamberlain and his following substituted for reality.

The Nazis themselves used to write quite a lot in those years about the weakness of the USSR in an attempt to sustain the hope of the governing quarters of the Western powers that all the concern of the Nazi Reich was to do away with the Soviet State. When it came, however, to deciding, by deed, not by word, who of the opponents was the weaker side, and with whom it was less dangerous to fight, it turned out that Germany was prepared to measure swords with anybody but the Soviet Union in 1939.¹⁵⁴

The German military command, taking into account the Red Army's strength, considered that to fight the Soviet Union Germany must first build up her military potential at the expense of the countries of Western Europe, to "safeguard the rear", create the necessary coalition and create a wide springboard for attack.¹⁵⁵

This was proved with conclusive evidence by the testimonials of German generals Keitel and Brauchitsch. Asked by Hitler to say what would happen if the Reich attacked Poland, and France and Britain would come to her aid, both generals said they felt that Germany would finish Poland up within a month. Keitel believed that Germany would then crush France and Britain as well. Then Hitler put another question, what would happen if the USSR came out against Germany, too? General Brauchitsch replied that in that case "Germany would be beaten".¹⁵⁶

The Nazis realised that had there been close co-operation between the USSR, Britain and France, Germany would have found herself in a very tight corner. Referring to Hitler's comments in his conversation with Wehrmacht chiefs, the chief of the General Staff of Germany's Land Forces, Halder, said: "It's hard to swallow a pact between the British and the Russians... On the other hand, it's the only thing that will stop Hitler now."¹⁵⁷ Ribbentrop's representative W. Hewel also quoted the Nazi Chancellor's comment that in the event of the Moscow talks ending up in the conclusion of an alliance between the Western powers and the USSR, he would have had to give up the idea of attacking Poland. If the Western powers failed to sign an alliance

with the USSR, Hitler declared, "I can smash Poland without any danger of a conflict with the West."¹⁵⁸

This has been confirmed also by diaries of Weizsäcker, State Secretary of German Ministry for Foreign Affairs. He wrote on July 30 that whether or not there was to be a war that summer depended on the outcome of the Anglo-Franco-Soviet negotiations in Moscow.¹⁵⁹

Spokesmen of a faction within the German ruling establishment who believed that Germany was not prepared for a major war as yet and feared that one more warlike venture by Hitler could end up in Germany's defeat, sent their representative to London to warn the British about Hitler's plans. The man they had chosen to carry out that mission was an official of the German Foreign Ministry, Erich Kordt, whose brother Theodor Kordt worked as counsellor of the German embassy in London. The trip was undertaken under a perfectly plausible pretext: Erich had decided to pay a visit to his brother. Having arrived in London in the latter half of May, Erich Kordt had a secret meeting with R. Vansittart. He warned that Hitler was still sure that Britain and France did not intend to lend Poland effective help. "What he is frightened of is Soviet Russia",¹⁶⁰ Erich Kordt declared.

Early in August Hitler declared on several occasions that he would not undertake military operations against Poland before he felt sure that Russia would not come to her aid.¹⁶¹

The USSR Rejected German Proposals

Since Hitler did not consider Germany for the time being to be adequately prepared to attack the USSR, he told Ribbentrop that it was "necessary to stage a new Rapallo episode in German-Russian relations" and that "it will be necessary to pursue a policy of equilibrium and economic co-operation with Moscow for a certain period of time".¹⁶² As Weizsäcker wrote later on, they had "begun to woo the Russians".¹⁶³

That became apparent shortly afterwards from the tone of German press comments. The German papers gradually stopped publishing all references to German plans with regard to the Ukraine just as any of their typical anti-Soviet insinuations. At the New Year's reception on January 12,

Hitler chatted for a few minutes with Soviet Ambassador A. F. Merkalov, something he had never done before on similar occasions. Hitler subsequently confessed that at that very reception he set course towards an accord with the USSR.¹⁶⁴ It was likewise typical of Hitler's speeches of January 20 and April 28 that they lacked his earlier standard invectives against the Soviet Union. On May 12, 1939, the Soviet Chargé d'Affaires in Germany, G. A. Astakhov, reported to Moscow that "the Germans are striving to create the impression of German-Soviet relations becoming or having already become warmer. Dismissing all absurd rumours fabricated here by the Germans or by importune foreign correspondents, one can state for the time being only one thing as a certain fact, and that is a marked change of the tone of the German press in dealing with us... But, while noting these points, we cannot, of course, close our eyes to their outstanding superficiality and to their character that is in no way binding on the Germans... The motives which make the Germans change their tone in dealing with us are much too clear to take them seriously enough."¹⁶⁵

Representatives of the German government most cautiously broached the question of a possible improvement of German-Soviet relations also in their conversations with Soviet diplomats. So, on May 17, Astakhov conferred with a high-ranking German Foreign Ministry official, an expert on economic affairs, J. Schnurre, on the question of the status of the Soviet trade delegation in Prague. During that conversation Schnurre tried to touch also "the subject of an improvement of Soviet-German relations". The German representative started making "assurances that Germany has no aggressive designs whatsoever in respect of the USSR" and asked what was to be done to dispel Soviet mistrust. However, Astakhov declared that the Soviet government had no "evidence about any fundamental change of German policy". He remarked tersely that an improvement of the climate in relations between the two countries depended on the German government.¹⁶⁶

On May 20, the German Ambassador in Moscow, von Schulenburg, raised with Molotov the question of resuming economic conversations. To that end he proposed a visit by J. Schnurre to Moscow. The Soviet government, however, did not consider it possible, in view of the strained political

relations between the USSR and Germany, to conduct negotiations about increasing trade and economic links between the two countries. The People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs indicated as much to the German Ambassador. He pointed out that economic conversations had begun several times with Germany during the recent period, but invariably proved inconclusive. That was what gave the Soviet government the reason to tell the German side that it had the impression that the German government meant to stage a kind of game instead of businesslike negotiations on trade and economic issues. For this sort of game the People's Commissar said in his conversation with Schulenburg, Germany should look for another country as a partner, not the USSR which had no intention of joining in such a game.¹⁶⁷ Discouraged by that answer, Schulenburg called on Deputy People's Commissar Potemkin straightaway and "complained" to him in confusion that he was at a loss about what he should report to his government. But Potemkin could not "comfort" the Ambassador either.¹⁶⁸

That negative reply, although the Germans were prepared for it, could not but discourage them. The men in Berlin began planning further "moves" in confusion, but, fearful of yet another setback, they did not venture to make them. An outline letter to Schulenburg, prepared by Weizsäcker, reflected the apprehension that yet another appeal to the USSR "risked inviting another refusal". In the final text of the letter mailed to Moscow on May 27, Weizsäcker pointed out that a further German approach could make Moscow burst into laughter. Therefore Schulenburg was told to exercise "complete restraint" for the time being.¹⁶⁹

With Hitler's approval it was decided to undertake a further sounding in Berlin. On May 30 Weizsäcker pointed out in his conversation with Astakhov that Germany had taken off the agenda the "Ukrainian question" thereby removing a pretext for a war between the two countries. He said there was a chance of improving Soviet-German relations. "If the Soviet Government wants to talk on this subject," he continued, "there is such an opportunity. If, however, it means to 'encircle' Germany together with Britain and France and wants to act against Germany, we will get ready for it."¹⁷⁰

After that conversation Weizsäcker put down in his diary

that the German government was "making advances" but the Russians were still "showing mistrust".¹⁷¹

On June 17, 1939, Schulenburg, coming to Berlin for more instructions, talked it over with Astakhov in yet more definite terms.¹⁷² Referring to Astakhov's conversation with Weizsäcker, Schulenburg asked why the Soviet government was not reacting to the questions Weizsäcker had put. Yet he got no answer to his own question either. The Soviet government did not reply to the approaches of Nazi diplomats, while pressing on for an agreement with Britain and France. Schulenburg had to state in his report about this conversation that Astakhov had once more emphasised Moscow's distrust in Germany's policy.¹⁷³

On his return to Moscow, Schulenburg called on the Soviet People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs on June 29. He assured him that "the German government desires not only to normalise but even improve its relations with the USSR". Schulenburg stressed that this statement, which he made on behalf of Ribbentrop, had Hitler's approval. In the course of this conversation he referred, in particular, to the 1926 Soviet-German Treaty of Neutrality. The Soviet People's Commissar ironically expressed his amazement at the fact that the German government still remembered that treaty; the Soviet government had quite a few doubts on this score. Considering the actual record of experience, the People's Commissar pointed out, the validity of treaties could well be open to doubt.¹⁷⁴

On the following day, the German Ministry for Foreign Affairs cabled an urgent message to Schulenburg to tell him that "in the political field enough has been said until further instructions and that for the moment the talks should not be taken up again by us".¹⁷⁵ For a whole month the Germans no longer ventured to approach the Soviet government on these matters.

The soundings were resumed late in July when Britain's consent to start military conversations with the USSR became known in Berlin. On July 24 J. Schnurre, with reference to Ribbentrop, told G. A. Astakhov "about the need to improve political relations between the USSR and Germany". He expressed his disappointment over the fact that "the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs left unanswered all German overtures with the view of talking this subject over".¹⁷⁶ In a subsequent conversation with

Astakhov on July 26, Schnurre repeated these remarks.¹⁷⁷

On August 3, 1939, G. A. Astakhov was invited to see Ribbentrop. The German Minister declared that there were no unresolvable issues between the USSR and Germany "all over the land from the Black Sea to the Baltic. Agreement on all of these issues can be achieved if the Soviet government shares these underlying principles". In an effort to put up some pressure, Ribbentrop did not conceal that Germany was conducting secret negotiations with Britain and France. At the same time Ribbentrop resorted once more to unequivocal threats. "If you have different prospects", he said, "if, for instance, you consider that the best way to adjust relations with us is by inviting Anglo-French Missions to Moscow, that is, of course, up to you. As far as we are concerned, we do not pay any attention to all the hue and cry against us from the camp of so-called West European democracies. We are strong enough to look at their threats with contempt and derision. We are sure of our strength; there is no war which we could not win."¹⁷⁸

On the same day, German Ambassador Schulenburg put the same questions to Molotov. After pointing out that normalisation of Soviet-German relations would meet the desire of the Soviet government, the People's Commissar declared straight away that it was not through the Soviet government's fault that these relations had deteriorated, and pinpointed the Anti-Comintern Pact as the root cause behind bad German-Soviet relations. The People's Commissar went on to cite examples of anti-Soviet foreign policy of the Third Reich; support for, and encouragement of Japanese aggression against the USSR and the Munich Agreement. How could all that be reconciled with the Ambassador's assurances that Germany had no hostile designs against the USSR? He then made it clear that the Soviet government did not trust the peaceful assurances of the Nazis regarding Poland. A peaceful settlement of the Polish question, he said, depends, above all, on the German side.¹⁷⁹

Schulenburg's conclusions from that conversation were disappointing once again. In his dispatch to Berlin on August 4, he stated that the Soviet government "was determined to conclude an agreement with Britain and France."¹⁸⁰ Three days later Schulenburg wrote that in Moscow "at every word and at every step one can sense the great

distrust towards us. That this is so, we have known for a long time." The unfortunate part of it is that the mistrust is very easily kindled, "and can only be allayed slowly and with difficulty."¹⁸¹

Weizsäcker stated on August 6 that the Germans were making increasingly hard efforts to reach an agreement, but Moscow left those feelers unheeded.¹⁸²

There is enough documentary evidence to indicate that the Soviet government saw through the insidious designs of the Nazis. For instance, on August 8, 1939, G. A. Astakhov reported to Moscow that Nazi chiefs were not, naturally, going "to respect appropriate eventual commitments in earnest and for a long time. I think only that in the foreseeable future, they find possible a certain measure of agreement... As to the way things may shape up in the future, everything would depend, of course, not on these commitments, but on a new environment that would be created." G. A. Astakhov pointed out that the Germans were "obviously worried by our conversations with Anglo-French military men, and they are not stinting any arguments and promises of the largest possible order so as to forestall an eventual military agreement. For this sake, they are not prepared, as far as I can see, to make such declarations and gestures as could have seemed ruled out altogether several years back".¹⁸³

Even Western students and political journalists have had to recognise the extreme complexity of the Soviet Union's position in view of the reluctance of the Western powers to co-operate with it in the defence of peace in Europe. Here is, for instance, an excerpt from a book by British historian L. Mosley about the opening stages of the Second World War. Speaking of the natural rise of suspicion in the USSR regarding the motives behind Britain's and France's policies, he wrote that the Soviet leaders realised that they "could trust neither side. They feared that at any moment the procrastinating representatives of the democracies and the tempting talkers in Berlin would reveal themselves as tricksters and turn to each other once again as they had at Munich, leaving the Russians more isolated than ever. It was a time for caution."¹⁸⁴

Without ever reacting to the advances by German diplomats, the Soviet government persistently strove for the success of the Anglo-Franco-Soviet negotiations. But in the

middle of August it became perfectly obvious to the Soviet government that it was altogether impossible to come to terms with the governments of Britain and France about the conclusion of an effective treaty of mutual assistance.

So there was a kind of vicious circle: Britain and France wanted an accommodation with Germany, but she balked at it; Germany strove to get a treaty of non-aggression signed with the USSR, but the Soviet government turned down the German offers; the USSR was seeking a treaty of mutual assistance with Britain and France, but they shied away from it.

Incontestable evidence that Britain and France did not want to co-operate with the Soviet Union was provided by the British government's documents about Anglo-Franco-Soviet conversations which have recently been declassified (although not in their totality) and made available to researchers. None of the pronouncements of Chamberlain, Halifax and any other British Ministers at Cabinet meetings or in the Foreign Policy Committee, nor the memoranda submitted for their consideration contained any statements or documents to attest to a desire to conclude an effective treaty with the USSR about mutual assistance in opposing Nazi aggression. On the contrary, as shown earlier on, these documents prove beyond dispute that the British ruling quarters pursued entirely different objectives in the conversations with the USSR.

Right until mid-August, 1939, that is, so long as the slightest hope remained for the conclusion of an Anglo-Franco-Soviet agreement, the Soviet government left all German approaches unanswered. Yet because of the breakdown of the Three-Power talks, it was no longer possible to ignore the German overtures.

Since the Anglo-Franco-Soviet talks were clearly inconclusive, the Soviet government faced, in point of fact, the following alternative:

either to watch passively how Germany was overrunning or otherwise bringing into submission all the East European countries bordering on the USSR, occupying advantageous strategic vantage grounds for a subsequent attack on the USSR, and that at a time when any armed conflict breaking out near Soviet frontiers could erupt into full-scale hostilities;

or, taking advantage of Germany's indisposition to go to

war against the USSR at the time, to do everything possible under the circumstances for limiting the spread of German aggression so as to safeguard to the utmost the interests of the USSR as well as those of other nations and peoples of Eastern Europe, and to avert the possibility of spontaneous unpremeditated hostilities between Germany and the USSR.

Meanwhile, German diplomacy grew increasingly active.

On August 14, 1939 Schulenburg got instructions from Ribbentrop to call on the Soviet People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs on an urgent mission to make a statement that Britain and France were trying again to drive the Soviet Union into war against Germany. In 1914 this policy had serious consequences for Russia. It is the compelling interest of both countries to avoid for all future time the destruction of Germany and Russia in the interests of Western powers. By drawing such a prospect of Germany's war against the USSR, the German government expressed its willingness to conclude a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union. On the following day, the German Ambassador read out this statement to Molotov. Reporting to Berlin about it, Schulenburg pointed out that although the People's Commissar had welcomed Germany's intention to improve relations with the USSR, he still gave no straight reply to the questions asked, including the one about a possible arrival of Ribbentrop in Moscow.¹⁸⁵

Berlin grew manifestly impatient. On August 17 Schulenburg called on the Soviet People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs once again to confirm that Germany was prepared to conclude a non-aggression pact and ready to guarantee the Baltic States jointly with the USSR, also the German government promised to exercise influence on Japan for normalising Japanese-Soviet relations. Schulenburg reported that Germany's Minister for Foreign Affairs Ribbentrop was prepared to come to Moscow on August 18 or on any subsequent day.¹⁸⁶ Hitler declared that he was prepared to come to Moscow personally if need be.¹⁸⁷

The reply given to the German Ambassador was that Soviet-German relations should be improved through a series of practical steps, while the coming of the German Minister was impossible without preliminary thorough arrangements. Moreover, the People's Commissar again referred to Germany's anti-Soviet foreign policy down the years.¹⁸⁸

On instructions from Ribbentrop, Schulenburg, conferring with Molotov on August 19, once more insisted on the immediate visit by the German Minister to Moscow, only to be refused once again.¹⁸⁹

Non-Aggression Pact Signed

On August 20, 1939, Hitler addressed a message to Stalin to say that a "crisis may arise any day" and it might involve the Soviet Union unless it agreed to sign a non-aggression treaty with Germany. "I therefore again propose", the message said, "that you receive my Foreign Minister on Tuesday, August 22, but, at the latest on Wednesday, August 23. The Reich Foreign Minister has the fullest powers to draw up and sign the non-aggression pact."¹⁹⁰

It was impossible to decline the German overtures any longer. For it was necessary to forestall the outbreak of war across the Soviet Western border, when Soviet forces in the Far East were already engaged in fierce fighting against the Japanese aggressors in the area of the Khalkin-Gol River, that is there was a serious danger of war breaking out in the West and in the East at once, with the USSR having to fight it without any allies. In no way overestimating the value of the treaties signed with Germany, the Soviet government still found it necessary to accept the German offer this time.

It was in the evening of August 21, following the inconclusive last session of the conversations between the British, French and Soviet military missions, that the Soviet government finally agreed to the German Minister for Foreign Affairs coming to Moscow on August 23.

But that did not mean that the Soviet government had given up all further attempts to get an agreement concluded with Britain and France. On the following morning, foreign news agency reporters in Moscow were told that Ribbentrop's arrival for the conclusion of the non-aggression pact was not inconsistent with the continuation of negotiations between the British, French and Soviet military delegations with a view to organising resistance to aggression. On the contrary, the conclusion of the non-aggression pact was quite compatible with the conclusion of a triple alliance between France, Britain and the USSR. These acts

did not cancel each other out at all. The Anglo-Franco-Soviet pact, supplemented with a military agreement, had the aim of checking Germany, if she persisted in her aggressive designs. For the USSR and Germany to have concluded a non-aggression pact would have meant reducing the tension between the two countries.¹⁹¹

Ribbentrop arrived in Moscow on August 23 to sign the non-aggression pact.

One cannot help noting in this context a difference of principle between the approach of the governments of Britain and France, on the one hand, and that of Germany, on the other, to negotiations with the USSR. The German government unequivocally declared through its Ambassador in Moscow that it wished to conclude a non-aggression treaty with the USSR. The German head of government addressed a special message to Stalin on this matter. There was the German Foreign Minister in Moscow. These facts could not but point to Germany's true desire to conclude a treaty with the USSR without any delay. But all that was in sharp contrast to the attitude of London and Paris to the negotiations with the Soviet Union. While the Soviet government had spent months on end for inconclusive negotiations with Britain and France, it took but one day to draw up the text of the Soviet-German Treaty of Non-Aggression and sign it.

The Treaty, signed in the small hours of August 24, contained the commitments of non-aggression (Article I) and a statement on refusing assistance to a power attacking one of the contracting parties (Article II). Both parties undertook to inform one another on matters involving their common interests (Article III) and to stay out of any group of powers, directly or indirectly spearheaded against the other party. The Treaty was concluded for a term of 10 years.

The Soviet government's decision to conclude this treaty was an enforced, but the only right one, too, under the circumstances of the day because there had been no chance of ever creating an Anglo-Franco-Soviet coalition.

Conferring with the French Ambassador on August 23, 1939, Molotov emphasised that the Soviet government had decided to conclude the treaty with Germany only after it had definitely found that it could achieve nothing positive through the Anglo-Franco-Soviet conversations.¹⁹²

In an interview for *Izvestia*, People's Commissar for Defence Voroshilov also pointed out that the USSR had concluded a non-aggression pact with Germany because the "military conversations with France and Britain have reached a deadlock because of insurmountable differences."¹⁹³

Even the French military attaché in the USSR, Palasse admitted that throughout the Anglo-Franco-Soviet talks, the Soviet government showed its sincere interest in the conclusion of the Three-Power agreement and that to sign a treaty with Germany was the only right step for it to take under the circumstances. Writing on August 27 about the position of the Soviet government, he said: "I still believe that, fearful of the excessive strengthening of Germany, it would have preferred an agreement with France and with Britain, should it have proved possible at all."¹⁹⁴

The Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars and Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Molotov, declared at a session of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR a few days later that since the negotiations with Britain and France showed there was no ground for expecting to conclude a mutual assistance pact with them, the Soviet government could not fail to consider other ways of removing the danger of war between Germany and the USSR. "Our duty", he stressed, "is to think of the interests of the Soviet people and of the interests of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The more so since we are firmly convinced that the interests of the USSR coincide with the basic interests of the people of other countries."¹⁹⁵

The German government, while concluding the treaty of non-aggression with the USSR, pledged itself not to encroach on Soviet land. At the same time, it was to relinquish its plans of alienation of the Soviet Ukraine and to create a vassal "Ukrainian state" as, equally, the plans for its domination of the Baltic states including the idea of turning them into a springboard from which to attack the USSR.

By signing the non-aggression pact with Germany, the Soviet government contributed towards peace-keeping in the Far Eastern border areas of the USSR. The conclusion of the treaty caused confusion among the governing quarters of Japan which counted on Germany as their main ally in a war against the USSR. "The news of the conclusion of the non-aggression pact between the USSR and

Germany has produced a staggering impression over there, causing obvious disarray, particularly among the militarists and the fascist camp",¹⁹⁶ said a message from the Soviet Embassy in Japan. The Hirayama government, which was building its policy on anti-Soviet collaboration with Germany fell. Japan had to reconsider her plans and to refrain from invading the Soviet Far East for a while.

Japan found her position weakened in respect of China as well. On August 26, 1939, the Chinese Ambassador in Moscow, Yang Chieh said in a conversation with S. A. Lozovsky, Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, that he welcomed the conclusion of the Soviet-German pact of non-aggression because that treaty "will, no doubt, be a blow to Japan."¹⁹⁷

The Soviet Government did, naturally, realise that it was impossible to rely on the non-aggression pact with Germany providing safety from aggression. It was clear that as soon as Nazis found themselves strong enough to do so, they would bring all their forces into action against the USSR.¹⁹⁸

When the Soviet-German non-aggression pact came up for ratification in the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, it was stressed that it "cannot blunt our vigilance".¹⁹⁹

The USSR Wanted Talks with Britain and France Continued

Even after the signing of the Soviet-German Treaty of Non-Aggression, the Soviet government was still interested in co-operating with Britain and France. As the French Ambassador, Naggiar communicated to the U.S. Ambassador in Moscow, L. Steinhardt on August 23, Molotov had told him that "the non-aggression pact with Germany is not inconsistent with an alliance of mutual assistance between Great Britain, France and the Soviet Union". The Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars noted, however, the difficulties arising from Poland's refusal to accept Soviet aid.²⁰⁰ Molotov also emphasised that the Soviet-French Treaty remained in force as it stood.²⁰¹

The French military attaché in Moscow, Palasse, cabled to Paris on the same day: "I still consider that for the USSR to have settled the matter by concluding an agree-

ment with Germany was nothing but the best of the two evils, and, perhaps, a means of exercising pressure with a view to bringing about a sound and integrally well-welded coalition as soon as possible which, as it has always seemed to me, is an object of the Soviet leaders' desire."²⁰² On August 24, the Foreign Office informed the British embassy in Washington about Molotov's statement that "negotiations with France and Britain could be continued somewhat later, say in a week".²⁰³

However, the British and French military missions were ordered back to London and Paris. When they paid a courtesy call on Voroshilov on August 25, the latter told them: "Unfortunately, we have not succeeded in coming to agreement this time. But let us hope that on another occasion our work will be more successful."²⁰⁴

The matter came up again during the conversation the Soviet Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, S. A. Lozovsky, had with Yang Chieh, the Chinese Ambassador, on August 26. Replying to the Ambassador's question as to whether the Anglo-Franco-Soviet negotiations would continue, the Deputy People's Commissar declared that "negotiations with Britain and France went on for five months, and the departure of the delegation is but an episode in these talks. Delegations come and go, but the issue of the battle for peace remains. This departure is not due in any way to the conclusion of the non-aggression pact between the USSR and Germany, but to a lack of agreement on a number of issues. Should Britain and France accept the proposals of the Soviet government, the possibility of a treaty being concluded with them cannot be ruled out. . . . At the present time, the negotiations are being suspended, but their resumption depends on Britain and France".²⁰⁵

What was to be done further on was an issue that came up for debate at a French government meeting on August 24. Daladier expressed the view that negotiations with the Russians should be resumed. On the following day, one of his assistants, B. Genehrier suggested that a former French Air Minister Pierre Cot (who had consistently advocated co-operation with the USSR ever since 1933) should be sent to Moscow, in the hope that he could bring off the process of concluding an agreement. Doumenc also suggested that it was still possible to conclude an alliance

with the USSR. Yet no positive decisions on the matter were taken by the French government.²⁰⁶

The Chamberlain government made feverish attempts in those days, however, to secure a last-minute agreement with the rulers of the Nazi Reich, having lost all interest in the negotiations with the Soviet Union. So the events in the closing week of August of 1939 finally confirmed that what London and Paris sought was not an agreement with the USSR, but yet another imperialist collusion with the Nazi Reich.

The course of events made it quite clear how far-sighted and correct the Soviet government's policy was. Just as it feared, Britain and France did not offer the slightest aid to Poland after she had been attacked by the Nazi Reich. As long as there was a war going on in the East of Europe, the French forces were sitting it out behind the Maginot Line. That was the beginning of what came to be called the "phoney war". Had the USSR imprudently assumed any unilateral commitments at the time of the Anglo-Franco-Soviet talks while the British and French governments dodged all concrete obligations regarding active opposition to the aggressor in the West with fairly large forces, the Soviet Union could have found itself in a state of war with Germany without any true allies.

NAZI GERMANY TRIGGERS OFF WORLD WAR

"We Want War"

Hitler called a conference of Wehrmacht Commanders on August 22, 1939, to tell them he wanted the war to be started immediately. He claimed, and not without some reason, that although Britain and France had assumed certain obligations in respect of Poland, they would not actually fulfil them.²⁰⁷

The German Nazis were no longer satisfied with their bloodless victories. They were preparing for a world war and wanted their recruits to be tried out in a local conflict, that is, in the war against Poland.

Therefore, when the Italian Minister for Foreign Affairs Ciano asked Ribbentrop: "What do you want: the Corridor

or Danzig?"—the German Minister cynically declared: "Neither the one, nor the other... We want war."²⁰⁸ Hitler informed the Italians that, in the opinion of the German General Staff, it would take from four to six weeks to put Poland to rout. Since autumn rains and slush begin in Poland on October 15, "the last date for the beginning of the operation is the end of August."²⁰⁹

In the course of the war with Poland, the Nazis planned to intimidate all of their other possible adversaries, particularly the small nations of Europe, with acts of vandalism without precedent in human history, to get them to surrender without resistance. The Nazis contemplated an inhuman extermination of the population of Poland also with a view to securing "living space" (Lebensraum) for the German "race of masters". When it came to an armed struggle between Germany and Poland, Hitler told Ribbentrop, "the German Army will be acting cruelly and mercilessly. Throughout the world... the Germans are known as Huns, but what will take place in case of war with Poland will outmatch what the Huns did."²¹⁰

Anglo-German Deal Projected at Poland's Expense

With the world swiftly drifting to war, the British and the French governments made yet another attempt at colluding with the Nazis. The British Ambassador in Berlin, Henderson arrived at the conclusion that, just as in advance of Munich, Chamberlain had to get down to business himself once again. On Henderson's initiative the British Premier sent a message to Hitler on August 22 which clearly revealed the hypocrisy of Chamberlainian diplomacy. While pretending that the British government proposed to fulfil its obligations to Poland, Chamberlain pointed out that he was ready to enter into negotiations both to consider the issues in dispute between Germany and Poland, and to discuss the wider problems affecting the future of international relations, including matters of interest of Britain and Germany.²¹¹

The action undertaken by the British government was an unequivocal indication that, for the sake of a "general settlement" with Germany, it was ready for another Munich

situation, this time at the expense of Poland. W. Bullitt, having read Chamberlain's message, arrived at a far from casual conclusion that "it sounded to me like the preparation for a new Munich".²¹² As he informed the U.S. Ambassador in London, Kennedy, of the substance of his message, on the following day, Chamberlain himself confessed that Britain's policy on Poland was the same as it was on Czechoslovakia at the time of Munich.²¹³

Instead of affording assistance to Poland, in co-operation with the USSR, the British government drastically intensified pressure on her to make her surrender to Germany without waiting for a war to break out.

The United States also decided to do its bit towards yet another Munich, because it did not hope that Britain and France could hold out in case of war. On August 23, Kennedy urged in a message to the U.S. government that some pressure should be brought to bear on Poland urgently. "I see no other possibility",²¹⁴ he concluded. Joseph Kennedy, therefore, did not even suggest that Britain, France and the U.S. should exercise any pressure on Germany, that is, the aggressor, and found Poland's surrender to be the only "way out".

On August 23, Roosevelt addressed a message to the Italian king, and on August 24 to the Nazi Chancellor and the President of Poland, calling on them to work towards a peaceful settlement of the disputes that had developed.

With the arrival in London of the British Ambassador to Germany, Henderson, who was, like Chamberlain, a committed partisan of an accommodation with Germany, there was yet more speculation about another shameful deal with the Führer in the making. Bullitt, for instance, cabled to the Department of State that, according to his information, the British Premier had agreed with his ambassador in Berlin about "preparing a careful betrayal of Poland using a variation of the technique that they employed so successfully on Czechoslovakia."²¹⁵

Describing the situation as it shaped up, I. M. Maisky pointed out on August 26 that "there is certainly some Munich mood in the air". The British government, Roosevelt, the Pope, the Belgian king, to mention just a few, he wrote, are feverishly groping for some ground on which to "compromise" on the Polish issue.²¹⁶ It was likewise noted in the *Diaries* of Oliver Harvey (Assistant to Halifax) on

August 27 that "another attempt at a Munich and selling out on the Poles" were in preparation. "Horace Wilson and A. A. Butler are working like beavers for this", he stressed.²¹⁷

As one can see from the minutes of British Cabinet meetings, which have now become available to historians, Halifax declared at one of them that the capture of Danzig, of itself was not yet providing a *casus belli* for Britain.²¹⁸ That meant that Britain did not intend to come to Poland's aid if the war began over Danzig. Chamberlain still believed, as late as August 26, that it was possible to reach an accommodation with Hitler. Setting out the Führer's position as he saw it, the British Premier said at a Cabinet meeting: "The basic idea was that if Britain would leave Herr Hitler alone in his sphere (Eastern Europe), he would leave us alone".²¹⁹ London was prepared for a new deal with the Führer on the same terms.

On the following day, August 27 Chamberlain and Halifax informed Hitler again—through their unofficial mediator, the Swedish industrialist Dahlerus, who plied between London and Berlin, that they "desired a settlement with Germany".²²⁰

Meanwhile, the Nazis were about through with their preparations for war. On August 23, the Danzig Nazis declared their Führer Vorster to be the head of municipal authorities. That was a premeditated act of provocation designed to invite the retaliation by the Polish government which was to serve as a pretext for Germany's "defensive measures" against Poland, that is, for the launching of hostilities.

Under those circumstances, the British government signed a mutual assistance agreement with Poland on August 25. Yet, it did not so much as suspect that so belated an agreement could save Poland from defeat. On the very next day Henderson said at the British Cabinet Meeting that "the real value of our guarantee to Poland was to enable Poland to come to a negotiated settlement with Germany".²²¹ However, even this evaluation proved exaggerated.

The British government made further attempts to come to terms with the Nazis. On August 28, Chamberlain sent another message to Hitler, urging him to settle the German-Polish conflict so as to get down to drafting a "broad" Anglo-German agreement. He expressly pointed out that he had a "sincere desire to reach agreement".²²²

The full meaning of that message was revealed, for instance, in a dispatch Hitler sent to Mussolini who was in close contact with the British government in those days. "Il Duce" wrote that Chamberlain's message contained "the pre-requisites and elements of what Germany would find as a favourable solution of all the problems of interest to her".²²³

Although it became known in London by that time that the Nazi Reich had concentrated a large number of divisions to strike at Poland in a matter of days, it was agreed at a British Cabinet meeting on August 30 that "these military concentrations afforded no valid argument against further negotiations with the German government".²²⁴ On the same day, Chamberlain admitted in talking to Kennedy that he was "more worried about getting the Poles to be reasonable than the Germans", considering that it was the Poles that had to yield ground. The British Premier declared that "what really needs to be done is to work out the whole European economic political problem" which he was "willing to do with Hitler".²²⁵

The French government proceeded along the same lines. Daladier reminded the Führer in a message: "No Frenchman has done more than I did for strengthening not only peace between our countries, but sincere co-operation".²²⁶

However, Hitler did not propose to change his plans. The only reason why he kept up contact with the British government and even offered to conclude an Anglo-German alliance,²²⁷ was because he wanted the impending armed conflict between Germany and Poland to be localised. He had no intention of concluding any agreement with Britain at all. Back on August 22 the German government issued an instruction about the line to take on various soundings for the possibility of opening negotiations: entering any negotiations was strictly forbidden.²²⁸

Nazis Go to War

Preparations for an attack on Poland were in full swing in the meantime. To attack Poland, Germany had concentrated 57 divisions and 2 brigades (including 6 armoured and 8 motorised divisions), which had strength of over one

and a half million, more than 2,500 tanks and up to 2,000 combat aircraft.²²⁹

At daybreak on the 1st of September, 1939, the German forces invaded Poland at three points. All the attempts of the British and French governments to come to agreement with Nazi Germany failed ignominiously. They had to face an extremely daunting task. They had themselves put England and France into an appallingly precarious predicament. The British and French governments could not count on a victory over Germany. Yet they presumed that to shirk their allied commitments to Poland would be still worse, as that would mean that Germany would swallow up Poland, Romania, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Greece and Turkey, one by one, and, with the resources of all these countries at their disposal in addition to their own, the aggressors would turn against France and England.²³⁰

England and France had to declare a state of war with Germany. It was now a world war.

CONCLUSION

The invasion of Poland by the forces of Nazi Germany was the opening act of the Second World War which involved all the Great Powers and many other nations. The war began as an imperialist war, and the responsibility for its outbreak lies with imperialism as a social-economic system.

Three imperialist powers were the major fire-brands of the Second World War: militarist Japan which had launched a drive for the domination of the Asian continent back in 1931; Nazi Germany which, as the strongest and, therefore, the most dangerous vulture, led the aggressor bloc's struggle for a redivision of the world; and fascist Italy which set out in 1935 to expand her colonial empire in Africa and, then, to bring the Mediterranean area under her control.

Co-operation of Britain and France with the Soviet Union could have forestalled the war. But the British and French governments did not wish to co-operate with the USSR. They were dreaming of a war between Germany and Japan, on the one hand, and the USSR, on the other, in which their imperialist rivals would have worn themselves out, while the Soviet state would have been weakened or even destroyed.

To channel German aggression against the USSR, the ruling circles of Britain and France sought to put this country into a state of international isolation. That was one of the aims behind the Munich sellout. By trying to isolate the Soviet Union, Britain and France got themselves isolated, however, having undermined their own international positions.

The Soviet Union was the only country to have done

whatever it could throughout the prowar years towards a collective effort by a number of nations to keep the peace and curb the increasingly arrogant aggressors. That was the concern behind the Soviet proposal for a definition of aggression, the draft Eastern Pact, the offer to conclude the Pacific Pact, the determination to reinforce the League of Nations, and the effort to bring about a dependable collective peace-keeping front during the Three-Powers Talks in Moscow in 1939. However the Soviet proposals were not supported by the governments of the Western Powers.

Taking advantage of the disunity of the nations they had their aggressive designs on, the fascist powers triggered off the Second World War.

Co-operation between the USSR, Britain and France in setting up a collective peace-keeping front could have raised dependable barriers in the way of the fascist aggressors. By their ignominious policy of connivance at aggression, and by their class-inspired imperialist policy of abetting German and Japanese aggression against the Soviet Union, the reactionary circles of the Western Powers made it possible for the fascist aggressors to start the Second World War.

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- ⁴⁶ Public Record Office, Cab. 23/82, pp. 337, 340, 345, 355. Laval also pointed out the "great danger that Communism can overthrow the regime in Italy, and Europe would hardly survive this storm". (G. Tsvetkov, *U.S. Policy Towards the USSR on the Eve of the Second World War*, Kiev, 1973, p. 97, in Russian.)
- ⁴⁷ Public Record Office, pp. 384-89.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., Cab. 24/260, p. 314.
- ⁴⁹ USSR FPA, s. 05, r. 16, f. 23, p. 261.
- ⁵⁰ Klaus Hildebrand, *Deutsche Aussenpolitik. 1933-1945. Kalkül oder Dogma?*, Stuttgart, 1971, S. 47.
- ⁵¹ DDF, Sér. 2, t. I, Paris, 1963, pp. 187-88.
- ⁵² Public Record Office, Cab. 24/259, p. 56.
- ⁵³ Oswald Hauser, *England und das Dritte Reich*, Bd. I, 1933 bis 1936, Seewald Verlag, Stuttgart, 1972, S. 174, 175.
- ⁵⁴ Public Record Office, Cab. 23/81, p. 28.
- ⁵⁵ Public Record Office, Cab. 23/83, pp. 237-40.
- ⁵⁶ USSR FPA, s. 059, r. 1, f. 1606, p. 77.
- ⁵⁷ *Documents on Soviet Foreign Policy*, Vol. XIX, pp. 129, 131, 731-32.
- ⁵⁸ DDF 1932-39, sér. 2 (1936-1939), t. I, Paris, 1963, p. 628.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 525.
- ⁶⁰ Public Record Office, Cab. 24/261, p. 190.
- ⁶¹ Public Record Office, Cab. 27/622, pp. 50-61, Cab. 27/626, pp. 84-89.
- ⁶² USSR FPA, s. 059, r. 1, f. 1582, p. 110.
- ⁶³ M. Cowling, *The Impact of Hitler...*, Op. cit., pp. 147, 463.
- ⁶⁴ Public Record Office, Cab. 23/83, pp. 288, 292.
- ⁶⁵ *Documents on Soviet Foreign Policy*, Vol. XIX, p. 142.
- ⁶⁶ *Pravda*, 19 March 1936.
- ⁶⁷ *Pravda*, 24 March 1936.
- ⁶⁸ USSR FPA, s. 059, r. 1, f. 1583, p. 37.
- ⁶⁹ L. B. Namier, *Europe in Decay*, MacMillan & Co. Ltd., London, 1950, p. 41.
- ⁷⁰ FRUS, *Diplomatic Papers. The Soviet Union 1933-1939*, Washington, 1952, p. 294.
- ⁷¹ *Pravda*, 24 March 1936.

- ⁷² Public Record Office, FO 418/81, pp. 78-79.
- ⁷³ Ibid., p. 55.
- ⁷⁴ *Documents on Soviet Foreign Policy*, Vol. XIX, p. 63.
- ⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 210-11.
- ⁷⁶ Public Record Office, FO 371/20339.
- ⁷⁷ Quoted from: Manfred Funke (Hrsg.), *Hitler, Deutschland und die Mächte*, Droste Verlag, Düsseldorf, 1977, S. 649.
- ⁷⁸ Public Record Office, Cab. 23/83, p. 292.
- ⁷⁹ Public Record Office, Cab. 21/438; G. Niedhardt, *Grossbritannien und die Sowjetunion 1934-1939*, Op. cit., S. 238.
- ⁸⁰ Public Record Office, Cab. 418/81, p. 92.
- ⁸¹ FRUS, *Diplomatic Papers. The Soviet Union...*, Op. cit., p. 283.
- ⁸² M. Litvinov, *Foreign Policy of the USSR. Speeches and statements*, p. 165.
- ⁸³ *Documents on Soviet Foreign Policy*, Vol. XIX, p. 338.
- ⁸⁴ F. P. Walters, *A History of the League of Nations*, Vol. II, London, New York, Toronto, 1952, p. 585.
- ⁸⁵ USSR FPA, s. 059, r. 1, f. 1583, p. 37.
- ⁸⁶ *Public Record Office*, Cab. 27/622, p. 81.
- ⁸⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸⁸ FRUS, 1937, Vol. 1, Washington, 1954, p. 188.
- ⁸⁹ *Documents on Soviet Foreign Policy*, Vol. XXI, Moscow, 1977, p. 20.
- ⁹⁰ FRUS, 1937, Vol. 1, p. 265.
- ⁹¹ G. Tsvetkov, Op. cit., p. 69.
- ⁹² *Documents on German Foreign Policy. 1918-1945*, ser. D, Vol. 3, London, 1951, p. 763.
- ⁹³ *Die Weizsäcker Papiere 1933-1950*, Hrsg. vom L. E. Hill, Propyläen Verlag, Fr./M., 1974, S. 102.
- ⁹⁴ *Guerra y Revolución en España 1936-1936*, Tomo 1, Editorial Progreso, Moscow, 1967, pp. 202-03.
- ⁹⁵ Ibid., pp. 205-06. Subsequently Mussolini admitted, in a conversation with Chamberlain, that Italy had lost 50 thousand men in Spain (DBFP, ser. 3, Vol. II, London, 1949, p. 632).
- ⁹⁶ *Chips. The Diaries of Sir Henry Channon*, Op. cit., p. 73.
- ⁹⁷ *History of Diplomacy*, Second edition, Vol. III, p. 632 (in Russian).
- ⁹⁸ V. I. Popov, *Diplomatic Relations Between the USSR and Britain*, pp. 287, 295 (in Russian).
- ⁹⁹ USSR FPA, s. 05, r. 16, f. 24, pp. 54-55.

- ¹⁰⁰ Ibid., s. 059, r. 1, f. 1565, pp. 168-69.
- ¹⁰¹ Ibid., s. 05, r. 16, f. 123, pp. 111-12.
- ¹⁰² Ibid., s. 059, r. 1, f. 1608, p. 138; s. 05, r. 16, f. 123, p. 124.
- ¹⁰³ *Papers and Memoirs of Józef Lipsky*, New York, 1968, p. 277.
- ¹⁰⁴ Robert Bendiner, *The Riddle of the State Department*, Ferrar and Rinehart, Inc., New York, 1942, p. 56.
- ¹⁰⁵ William E. Dodd, *Ambassador Dodd's Diary 1933-1938*, Brace Harcourt, Brace and Co., New York, 1941, p. 378.
- ¹⁰⁶ *Documents on Soviet Foreign Policy*, Vol. XIX, p. 418.
- ¹⁰⁷ *Izvestia*, 8 October 1936.
- ¹⁰⁸ *Izvestia*, 24 October 1936.
- ¹⁰⁹ *Guerra y Revolución en España 1936-1939*, Tomo II, p. 101.
- ¹¹⁰ *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, Odhams Press Limited, London, 1948, pp. 57-59.
- ¹¹¹ L. N. Kutakov, *A History of Soviet-Japanese Diplomatic Relations*, p. 155 (in Russian).
- ¹¹² USSR FPA, s. 010, r. 11, f. 34, p. 14.
- ¹¹³ *Der Nationalsozialismus. Dokumente 1933-1945*, Hrsg. W. Hofer, Fischer Bücherei, Fr./M., 1957, S. 192.
- ¹¹⁴ V. T. Fomin, *Fascist Germany's Aggression in Europe. 1933-1939*, Moscow, 1963, p. 212 (in Russian).
- ¹¹⁵ USSR FPA, s. 011, r. 2, f. 203, pp. 2-5.
- ¹¹⁶ *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945*, Ser. D, Vol. III, London, 1951, p. 169.
- ¹¹⁷ *Izvestia*, 12 September 1937.
- ¹¹⁸ USSR FPA, s. 05, r. 18, f. 160, p. 30.
- ¹¹⁹ G. N. Sevostianov, *Great Power Policies in the Far East on the Eve of the Second World War*, Moscow, 1961, pp. 20-21 (in Russian).
- ¹²⁰ Summer Welles, *The Time for Decision*, Harper & Brothers Publishers, New York, 1944, p. 64.
- ¹²¹ *Izvestia*, 1 August 1937.
- ¹²² USSR FPA, s. 05, r. 15, f. 122, pp. 126, 128-29.
- ¹²³ *Documents on Soviet Foreign Policy*, Vol. XVIII, p. 239.
- ¹²⁴ USSR FPA, s. 059, r. 1, f. 1263, p. 270.
- ¹²⁵ *Documents on Soviet Foreign Policy*, Vol. XVIII, pp. 662-63.
- ¹²⁶ DGFP, Ser. C, Vol. IV, p. 952.
- ¹²⁷ L. N. Kutakov, *A History of Soviet-Japanese Diplomatic Relations*, pp. 220-21.

- ¹²⁸ *Soviet-Mongolian Relations. 1921-1974. Documents and Materials*, Vol. I, Moscow, 1975, p. 548 (in Russian).
- ¹²⁹ *Documents on Soviet Foreign Policy*, Vol. XIX, p. 197.
- ¹³⁰ *Documents on Soviet Foreign Policy*, Vol. XX, Moscow, 1976, p. 117.
- ¹³¹ Ibid., pp. 155, 701.
- ¹³² USSR FPA, s. 09, r. 30, f. 180, pp. 117-22.
- ¹³³ *Documents on Soviet Foreign Policy*, Vol. XX, pp. 266, 278.
- ¹³⁴ Ibid., pp. 303-04.
- ¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 310.
- ¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 732.
- ¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 338.
- ¹³⁸ *Izvestia*, 22 July 1937.
- ¹³⁹ *Documents on Soviet Foreign Policy*, Vol. XX, p. 394.
- ¹⁴⁰ USSR FPA, s. 09, r. 30, f. 180, pp. 72-73.
- ¹⁴¹ *Documents on Soviet Foreign Policy*, Vol. XX, pp. 394, 430, 438.
- ¹⁴² Ibid., pp. 385, 393, 400.
- ¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 389.
- ¹⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 430, 701.
- ¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 738.
- ¹⁴⁶ *Pravda*, 30 August 1937.
- ¹⁴⁷ *Documents on Soviet Foreign Policy*, Vol. XX, p. 747.
- ¹⁴⁸ A. G. Yakovlev, "The USSR and the Struggle of the Chinese People Against Japanese Aggression (1931-1945)" in: *Leninist Policy of the USSR Towards China*, Moscow, 1968, pp. 102-03 (in Russian).
- ¹⁴⁹ USSR FPA, s. 09, r. 30, f. 180, pp. 74-75.
- ¹⁵⁰ *Soviet Peace Efforts on the Eve of World War II. Documents and Records*, Moscow, 1971, p. 650 (hereinafter: *Soviet Peace Efforts...*).
- ¹⁵¹ FRUS, 1937, Vol. III, Washington, 1954, pp. 403-04, 477, 568.
- ¹⁵² USSR FPA, s. 09, r. 27, f. 57, pp. 24-26.
- ¹⁵³ USSR FPA, s. 09, r. 27, f. 61, p. 14.
- ¹⁵⁴ *Documents on Soviet-Polish Relations*, Vol. VI, p. 333.
- ¹⁵⁵ *Documents on Soviet Foreign Policy*, Vol. XX, p. 478.
- ¹⁵⁶ *Izvestia*, 22 September 1937.
- ¹⁵⁷ F. P. Walters, *A History of the League of Nations*, Vol. II, p. 783.
- ¹⁵⁸ *Documents on Soviet Foreign Policy*, Vol. XX, pp. 752-53.

- ¹⁵⁹ Anthony Eden's private secretary, Oliver Harvey noted in his diaries of October-November, 1937, that Chamberlain was "strongly opposed to any sort of economic boycott" of Japan. "On no account will I impose a sanction," he declared. (*The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey 1937-1940*, Collins, London, 1970, pp. 49, 50).
- ¹⁶⁰ *Documents on Soviet Foreign Policy*, Vol. XX, p. 530.
- ¹⁶¹ FRUS, 1937, Vol. III, pp. 570-71.
- ¹⁶² *The Sino-Japanese Conflict and the League of Nations. 1937*, Geneva, 1937, pp. 64-80.
- ¹⁶³ USSR FPA, s. 05, r. 17, f. 90, p. 20.
- ¹⁶⁴ FRUS, 1937, Vol. IV, pp. 85-86; *The Moffat Papers. Selections from the Diplomatic Journals of Jay Pierrepont Moffat 1919-1943*, Harvard University Press, Cambr. (Mass.), 1956, p. 157.
- ¹⁶⁵ Public Record Office, Cab. 27/626, p. 246.
- ¹⁶⁶ *Documents on Soviet Foreign Policy*, Vol. XX, p. 762.
- ¹⁶⁷ USSR FPA, s. 05, r. 17, f. 1, pp. 345-46.
- ¹⁶⁸ FRUS, 1937, Vol. IV, pp. 119-20.
- ¹⁶⁹ *The Conference of Brussels, November 3-24, 1937*, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, 1938, pp. 26, 27.
- ¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 34.
- ¹⁷¹ FRUS, 1937, Vol. IV, pp. 157-58.
- ¹⁷² *Izvestia*, 15 November 1937.
- ¹⁷³ FRUS, 1937, Vol. IV, pp. 198-99.
- ¹⁷⁴ *The Conference of Brussels...*, pp. 76-77.
- ¹⁷⁵ *Documents on Soviet Foreign Policy*, Vol. XX, p. 617.
- ¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 622-23.
- ¹⁷⁷ *Izvestia*, 16 May 1938.
- ¹⁷⁸ *Pravda*, 23 February 1938.
- ¹⁷⁹ *Documents on Soviet Foreign Policy*, Vol. XXI, p. 174.
- ¹⁸⁰ D. Bergamini, *Japan's Imperial Conspiracy*, London, 1971, p. 692.
- ¹⁸¹ *Pravda*, 18 July 1938.
- ¹⁸² *Izvestia*, 22 July 1938.
- ¹⁸³ Quoted from: M. Y. Raginsky and S. Y. Rosenblit, *International Trial of Major Japanese War Criminals*, Moscow-Leningrad, 1950, p. 260 (in Russian).
- ¹⁸⁴ *Documents on Soviet Foreign Policy*, Vol. XXI, p. 697.
- ¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 43.
- ¹⁸⁶ USSR FPA, s. 05, r. 18, f. 3, p. 125.

¹⁸⁷ Public Record Office, Cab. 27/623, pp. 317-21.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 307-10.

¹⁸⁹ *Soviet Peace Efforts...*, p. 219.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

¹⁹¹ Keith Middlemas, *Diplomacy of Illusion. The British Government and Germany, 1937-39*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1972, pp. 257-58.

¹⁹² B. A. Borodin, *Soviet Aid to the Chinese People in Their Anti-Japanese War. 1937-1941*, Moscow, 1965, pp. 160-72 (in Russian).

¹⁹³ *Documents on Soviet Foreign Policy*, Vol. XXI, pp. 410, 732.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 462-63, 475-77.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 482, 486.

CHAPTER III

- ¹ USSR FPA, s. 05, r. 15, f. 122, p. 208. The strengthening of Nazi Germany, the People's Commissar wrote, will inevitably draw Romania into the German orbit, thereby "opening the gateway for her into the Ukraine where Poland is pushing her".
- ² *Documents on Soviet Foreign Policy*, Vol. XIX, p. 61.
- ³ *The USSR in Action for the Independence of Austria*, Moscow, 1965, p. 17 (in Russian).
- ⁴ *International Military Tribunal. Trial of the Major War Criminals*, Bd. XXXIV, p. 408.
- ⁵ USSR FPA, s. 05, r. 18, f. 1, pp. 11-13.
- ⁶ W. Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol. I, Op. cit., pp. 222-23.
- ⁷ *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945*, Ser. D, Vol. 1, United States Government Printing Office, Washington, 1949, pp. 165, 167.
- ⁸ Robert Sencourt, "The Foreign Policy of Neville Chamberlain", in: *The Quarterly Review*, April 1954, No. 600, p. 153.
- ⁹ *The Eden Memoirs. Facing the Dictators*, Cassell, London, 1962, p. 559.
- ¹⁰ IDA, Microfilm bank, records of the Beck-Eden conversation in London, 19 May 1937. In his recollections, Anthony Eden tried to present himself as a consistent opponent of aggression and supporter of collective security, but there is no documentary evidence, not even British, to bear him out.
- ¹¹ USSR FPA, s. 05, r. 18, f. 6, p. 24.
- ¹² *Documents on Soviet Foreign Policy*, Vol. XX, pp. 632, 688, 764-65.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 613.
- ¹⁴ *The Ironside Diaries 1937-1940*, Constable, London, 1962, p. 48.

- ¹⁵ FRUS, 1938, Vol. I, p. 29.
- ¹⁶ FRUS, 1937, Vol. I, p. 142.
- ¹⁷ *Documents on Soviet Foreign Policy*, Vol. XX, p. 595.
- ¹⁸ S. Welles, *Seven Decisions That Shaped History*, New York, 1950, p. 251.
- ¹⁹ Frederick L. Schuman, *Soviet Politics. At Home and Abroad*, New York, Alfred Knopf, 1946, p. 282.
- ²⁰ *Documents and Materials Relating to the Eve of the Second World War*, Vol. I, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1948, pp. 19, 20, 34, 35.
- ²¹ Public Record Office, Cab. 23/90, p. 168.
- ²² Public Record Office, Cab. 27/626, pp. 256-57.
- ²³ IDA, the letter of 3 December 1937, from the Latvian Minister in Warsaw, M. Walters, to the Latvian Ministry for Foreign Affairs.
- ²⁴ Public Record Office, Cab. 23/90, p. 219.
- ²⁵ Public Record Office, Cab. 27/623, p. 41.
- ²⁶ *Documents on Soviet Foreign Policy*, Vol. XXI, p. 109.
- ²⁷ DGFP, Ser. D, Vol. I, United States Government Printing Office, Washington, 1949, p. 253.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 271, 272.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 262.
- ³⁰ *International Military Tribunal. Trial of the Major War Criminals*, Vol. XXXIV, p. 337.
- ³¹ Keith Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain*, London, MacMillan & Co. Ltd., 1946, p. 342.
- ³² USSR FPA, s. 059, r. 1, f. 1928, pp. 200-02.
- ³³ *A History of Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917-1945*, Vol. I, Moscow, 1976, p. 341 (in Russian).
- ³⁴ *Izvestia*, 18 March 1938.
- ³⁵ *Pravda*, 25 March 1938.
- ³⁶ FRUS, 1937, Vol. I, p. 147.
- ³⁷ *Papers and Memoirs of Józef Lipski...*, Op. cit., pp. 314-16, 360, 427.
- ³⁸ DGFP, Ser. D, Vol. V, p. 38.
- ³⁹ *Documents ... on Soviet-Polish Relations*, Vol. VI, pp. 348-49.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 334.
- ⁴¹ *Socialist Revolutions in the Baltic Countries in 1940*, Moscow, 1978, pp. 144-45 (in Russian).
- ⁴² *Przegląd Powszechny*, 1938, No. 4.

- ⁴³ *Soviet-Polish Relations. 1918-1945. Collected Articles*, Moscow, 1974, p. 215 (in Russian).
- ⁴⁴ *Papers and Memoirs of Józef Lipski...*, Op. cit., pp. 323, 328, 331, 333, 336.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 348, 350.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 353, 354.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 354.
- ⁴⁸ DGFP, Ser. D, Vol. V, pp. 433, 437.
- ⁴⁹ *Documents on Soviet Foreign Policy*, Vol. XXI, p. 154 (in Russian).
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 130.
- ⁵¹ *Documents on Soviet-Polish Relations*, Vol. VI, pp. 343-44.
- ⁵² A. A. Shevyakov, *Soviet-Romanian Relations and the Problem of European Security. 1932-1939*, Moscow, 1977, pp. 196-97 (in Russian).
- ⁵³ *Documents on Soviet Foreign Policy*, Vol. XX, pp. 431-32.
- ⁵⁴ DGFP, Ser. D, Vol. I, pp. 916-17.
- ⁵⁵ *Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945*, Ser. D, Vol. II, United States Government Printing Office, Washington, 1949, p. 198.
- ⁵⁶ *Documents on the Background to the Munich Sellout. 1937-1938*, Moscow, 1979, pp. 53-54 (in Russian).
- ⁵⁷ *Izvestia*, 18 March 1938.
- ⁵⁸ *International Affairs*, No. 6, 1973. West German historian Fabry admits that in the face of the Czechoslovak crisis, Litvinov tried again to breathe new life into the policy of collective security (Ph. W. Fabry, *Die Sowjetunion und das Dritte Reich*, Stuttgart, 1974, S. 63).
- ⁵⁹ Public Record Office, Cab. 27/623, p. 139.
- ⁶⁰ *Das Abkommen von München 1938. Tschechoslowakische diplomatische Dokumente*, Praha, 1968, S. 89.
- ⁶¹ Public Record Office, Cab. 27/623, pp. 187-92.
- ⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 164, 172.
- ⁶³ DBFP 1919-1939, Ser. 3, Vol. I, 1938, London, 1949, pp. 83-86.
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 96-97.
- ⁶⁵ E. von Weizsäcker, *Erinnerungen*, München, 1950, S. 154.
- ⁶⁶ *Parliamentary Debates. House of Commons*, London, 1938, Vol. 333, Col. 1406.
- ⁶⁷ Général Gamelin, *Servir. Le prologue du drame (1930-août 1939)*, P. Librairie Plon, 1946, pp. 321-24.
- ⁶⁸ USSR FPA, s. 05, r. 18, f. 138, p. 25.

- ⁶⁹ *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull*, Vol. I, New York, The MacMillan Company, 1948, pp. 658-59.
- ⁷⁰ USSR FPA, s. 0129, r. 24, f. 2, p. 28.
- ⁷¹ William L. Langer and S. Everett Gleason, *The Challenge to Isolation. 1937-1940*, Harper & Brothers, New York, 1952, p. 67.
- ⁷² *Documents on the Background to the Munich Sellout. 1937-1938*, op. cit., p. 87.
- ⁷³ *Documents on Soviet Foreign Policy*, Vol. XXI, p. 218.
- ⁷⁴ Public Record Office, FO 371/22299.
- ⁷⁵ M. I. Kalinin, *On the International Situation*, Moscow, 1938, p. 14 (in Russian).
- ⁷⁶ *Pravda*, 28 December 1949.
- ⁷⁷ A. Adamthwaite, *France and the Coming of the Second World War. 1936-1939*, London, 1977, p. 183.
- ⁷⁸ Public Record Office, Cab. 23/93, p. 195.
- ⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 193, 196-97.
- ⁸⁰ A. Adamthwaite, Op. cit., p. 179.
- ⁸¹ DBFP, ser. 3, Vol. I, pp. 199-202, 208, 214.
- ⁸² DGFP, ser. D, Vol. I, p. 1104.
- ⁸³ *The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey 1937-1940*, London, Collins 1970, p. 133.
- ⁸⁴ *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan 1938-1945*, Op. cit., p. 73.
- ⁸⁵ DBFP 1919-1939, ser. 3, Vol. I, London, 1949, pp. 267, 269.
- ⁸⁶ DGFP, ser. D, Vol. II, p. 265.
- ⁸⁷ FRUS, 1938, Vol. I, p. 39.
- ⁸⁸ DBFP 1919-1939, ser. 3, Vol. I, p. 314.
- ⁸⁹ USSR FPA, s. 059, r. 1. f. 1907, pp. 26-27.
- ⁹⁰ *Documents on Soviet Foreign Policy*, Vol. XXI, pp. 262-63, 284.
- ⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 263, 284-85.
- ⁹² *Documents on the Background to the Munich Sellout. 1937-1939*, Op. cit., pp. 112, 117.
- ⁹³ *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan 1938-1945*, Op. cit., p. 79.
- ⁹⁴ DBFP 1919-1939, ser. 3, Vol. I, pp. 331-32. British historian M. Cowling pointed out that the British Government had "played the script worked out back in March" (M. Cowling, *The Impact of Hitler*, p. 181).
- ⁹⁵ DGFP, ser. D, Vol. VII, p. 632.
- ⁹⁶ DBFP 1919-1939, ser. 3, Vol. I, pp. 346-47.
- ⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 346-47, 357.

- ⁹⁸ *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan*, Op. cit., p. 81.
- ⁹⁹ *Documents on Soviet Foreign Policy*, Vol. XXI, p. 296.
- ¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol. XXI, p. 296.
- ¹⁰¹ K. Middlemas, *Diplomacy of Illusion*, Op. cit., p. 239.
- ¹⁰² DGFP, ser. D, Vol. VII, p. 632.
- ¹⁰³ K. Middlemas, *Diplomacy of Illusion*, Op. cit., p. 241.
- ¹⁰⁴ DBFP 1919-1939, ser. 3, Vol. I, 1938, London, 1949, p. 357.
- ¹⁰⁵ Public Record Office, Cab. 23/93, pp. 347-50.
- ¹⁰⁶ DGFP, Ser. D, Vol. I, p. 722.
- ¹⁰⁷ *Documents and Materials...*, Op. cit., p. 113.
- ¹⁰⁸ USSR FPA, s. 05, r. 18, f. 6, p. 73. A record of M. M. Litvinov's conversation with Z. Fierlinger on 4 July 1938.
- ¹⁰⁹ *The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey*, Op. cit., p. 187.
- ¹¹⁰ K. Middlemas, *Diplomacy of Illusion*, p. 267.
- ¹¹¹ FRUS, 1938, Vol. 2, p. 541.
- ¹¹² *The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey*, p. 149.
- ¹¹³ *Documents on Soviet Foreign Policy*, Vol. XXI, p. 425.
- ¹¹⁴ A. Adamthwaite, Op. cit., p. 199.
- ¹¹⁵ *International Affairs*, No. 9, 1973.
- ¹¹⁶ *Documents on Soviet Foreign Policy*, Vol. XXI, p. 436.
- ¹¹⁷ FRUS, 1938, Vol. I, p. 546.
- ¹¹⁸ DBFP 1919-1939, ser. 3, Vol. II, 1938, London 1949, p. 107.
- ¹¹⁹ FRUS, 1938, Vol. I, pp. 67-68, 548.
- ¹²⁰ *Documents on the Background to the Munich Sellout*, p. 181.
- ¹²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 185-86.
- ¹²² *International Affairs*, No. 9, 1973.
- ¹²³ *Documents on Soviet Foreign Policy*, Vol. XXI, pp. 470-71. This Statement was immediately brought to the knowledge of the Soviet envoys in Britain, France and Czechoslovakia so that they could inform the respective governments.
- ¹²⁴ Zdeněk Fierlinger, *Ve službach CSR*, díl. I, Praha, 1947, s. 108. Fierlinger pointed out that Litvinov did not miss the slightest opportunity to improve relations with Romania and Poland, for the efficiency of Soviet assistance to Czechoslovakia depended on co-operation with these countries.
- ¹²⁵ DGFP, Ser. D, Vol. 2, p. 686.
- ¹²⁶ Erich Kordt, *Nicht aus den Akten Union Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft*, Stuttgart 1950, S.S. 279-81.
- ¹²⁷ K. Middlemas, Op. cit., p. 284.

- 128 I. Colvin, *Vansittart in Office*, Op. cit., p. 242.
- 129 *Documents on Soviet Foreign Policy*, Vol. XXI, pp. 487-88.
- 130 DGFP, Ser. D, Vol. II, p. 713.
- 131 Leonard Mosley, *On Borrowed Time. How World War II Began*, Random House, New York, 1969, p. 9.
- 132 DDF, ser. 2, t. XI, Paris 1977, pp. 106-07.
- 133 Harold Nicolson, *Diaries and Letters 1930-1939*, Collins, London, 1966, p. 359.
- 134 *The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey*, Op. cit., p. 222.
- 135 *Chips. The Diaries of Sir Henry Channon*, Ed. by R. R. James, London, 1967, pp. 164-65.
- 136 *The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey*, p. 176.
- 137 DBFP, Ser. 3, Vol. II, p. 292.
- 138 *The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey*, p. 178.
- 139 In connection with the plans for calling the conference, the senior diplomatic adviser of the Foreign Office, R. Vansittart, who was opposed to such a conference, submitted an aide-memoire to Halifax, pointing out that its essential object was one of "driving Russia out of Europe" which "would be completely playing the German game at every point". (Ian Colvin, *Vansittart in Office*, Victor Gollancz, Ltd., London, 1965, p. 248).
- 140 *Sunday Times*, January 5, 1969.
- 141 Ian Colvin, *Vansittart in Office*, Op. cit., p. 243.
- 142 *Die Weizsäcker-Papiere 1933-1950*, F/M, 1974, S. 169.
- 143 DBFP, ser. 3, Vol. II, pp. 338-41.
- 144 E. Kordt, *Nicht aus den Akten...*, Op. cit., S. 259.
- 145 Public Record Office, Cab. 27/646, pp. 25-29.
- 146 *The Ironside Diaries 1937-1940*, Op. cit., p. 64.
- 147 FRUS, 1938, Vol. 1, Washington, 1955, p. 618.
- 148 *Documents and Records...*, pp. 173-74.
- 149 DBFP 1919-1939, ser. 3, Vol. VII, 1939, London, 1954, p. 627.
- 150 FRUS, 1938, Vol. 1, Washington, 1955, p. 626.
- 151 *Documents on Soviet Foreign Policy*, Vol. XXI, p. 499.
- 152 *Ibid.*, p. 500.
- 153 W. Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol. I, Op. cit., p. 305.
- 154 *Geschichte der Diplomatie*, Bd. 3, Teil 2, SWA-Verlag, Berlin, 1948, S.S. 293-94.
- 155 DBFP 1919-1939, ser. 3, Vol. II, 1938, London, 1949, pp. 497-98.

- 156 *Das Abkommen von München 1938. Tschechoslowakische diplomatische Dokumente 1937-1939*, Praha, Academia, 1968, S. 295.
- 157 USSR FPA, s. 059, r. 1, f. 1908, p. 108.
- 158 L. S. Amery, *My Political Life*, Vol. III, Hutchinson, London, 1955, p. 293.
- 159 Arthur H. Furnia, *The Diplomacy of Appeasement*, The University Press of Washington, D.C. 1960, p. 356.
- 160 *Documents on Soviet Foreign Policy*, Vol. XXI, pp. 202-03.
- 161 *Ibid.*, p. 287.
- 162 *Documents on Soviet-Polish Relations*, Vol. VI, p. 361. At the same time, J. Beck set out the measures he had taken to make it more difficult for the Soviet Union to afford assistance to Czechoslovakia, and pointed out that Poland was opposed to Soviet involvement in European affairs.
- 163 *Documents and Materials*, Op. cit., pp. 181, 182.
- 164 B. Celovsky, *Das Münchener Abkommen 1938*, Deutsche Verlag-Anstalt, Stuttgart, 1938, S. 391.
- 165 FRUS, Vol. 1, 1938, Washington, 1955, p. 664. The French Ambassador in Berlin, A. François-Poncet wrote, not without indignation, on 22 September that Poland and Hungary had "joined Germany in hounding Czechoslovakia". There emerged a united front of three states "demanding a partition of that country". (DDF, ser. 2, t. XI, p. 454.)
- 166 *Documents on Soviet Foreign Policy*, Vol. XXI, pp. 515-16.
- 167 USSR FPA, s. 011, r. 2, f. 207, p. 46.
- 168 *Foreign Affairs*, October 1946, Vol. 25, No. 1, p. 37.
- 169 FRUS, 1938, Vol. 1, Washington, 1955, pp. 650-51.
- 170 *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, London, 1948, pp. 236, 237.
- 171 For more about Romania's stand on the matter see: A. A. Shevyakov, *Soviet-Romanian Relations and the Problem of European Security*, Moscow, 1977, pp. 263-70, 274-75.
- 172 DBFP 1919-1939, ser. 3, Vol. II, p. 562.
- 173 USSR FPA, s. 059, r. 1, f. 1979, p. 41.
- 174 *A History of the Second World War 1939-1945*, Vol. 2, pp. 105-07.
- 175 *Documents on Soviet Foreign Policy*, Vol. XXI, p. 530.
- 176 *A History of the Second World War*, Vol. 2, pp. 107-08.
- 177 B. Celovsky, *Das Münchener Abkommen 1938*, S.S. 384, 391.
- 178 *Geschichte der Diplomatie*, Bd. 3, Teil 2, Berlin, 1948, S. 295. Subsequently, Hitler agreed, by way of "concession", to postpone the occupation till 1 October.
- 179 ADAP, Ser. D, Bd. II, S.S. 694-702, 716-26; DBFP, ser. 3, Vol. II, pp. 463-73, 499, 508.

- ¹⁸⁰ Public Record Office, Cab. 23/95, p. 168.
- ¹⁸¹ *Papers and Memoirs of Józef Lipski...*, Op. cit., p. 420.
- ¹⁸² DBFP 1949-1939, ser. 3, Vol. II, p. 587.
- ¹⁸³ FRUS, 1938, Vol. 1, p. 688.
- ¹⁸⁴ L. Mosley, *On Borrowed Time...*, Op. cit., p. 65.
- ¹⁸⁵ *Documents on Soviet Foreign Policy*, Vol. XXI, pp. 543-44.
- ¹⁸⁶ G. Niedhardt, *Grossbritannien und die Sowjetunion 1934-1939*, Op. cit., S. 403.
- ¹⁸⁷ *Documents of the German Ministry for Foreign Affairs. 1st issue: German Policy in Hungary*, Moscow, 1946, p. 89 (in Russian).
- ¹⁸⁸ L. Mosley, Op. cit., pp. 66-67.
- ¹⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 68.
- ¹⁹⁰ Lord Strang, *Home and Abroad*, London, 1956, pp. 146-47.
- ¹⁹¹ L. B. Namier, *Europe in Decay*, London, MacMillan & Co. Ltd., 1950, p. 125.
- ¹⁹² Hugh Dalton, *The Fateful Years. Memoirs 1931-1945*, Frederick Muller Ltd., London, 1957, p. 195.
- ¹⁹³ Robert Coulondre, *De Staline à Hitler*, Hachette, Paris, 1950, pp. 165-66.
- ¹⁹⁴ CSHAL, s. 4313, r. 20, f. 135, p. 55.
- ¹⁹⁵ *Foreign Affairs*, October 1946, Vol. 25, No. 1, p. 38.
- ¹⁹⁶ W. Lippmann, *U.S. Foreign Policy: Shield of the Republic*, Little, Brown and Co., Boston, 1943, p. 116.
- ¹⁹⁷ B. Colovsky, Op. cit., S. 440.
- ¹⁹⁸ Frederick Birkenhead, *Halifax. The Life of Lord Halifax*, Boston 1966, p. 415.
- ¹⁹⁹ *Izvestia*, 4 October 1938.
- ²⁰⁰ *Izvestia*, 10 November 1938.
- ²⁰¹ Radomir Luža, *The Transfer of the Sudeten Germans*, New York University Press, New York, 1964, p. 163.
- ²⁰² The British Cabinet Secretary, Col. Hankey declared at a Cabinet meeting in March 1938 that since 1949 it had been recognised "that Czechoslovakia could only continue to exist if the whole territory were maintained as one unit". (Stephen Roskill, *Hankey, Man of Secrets*, Vol. III, 1931-1963, London, Collins, 1974, p. 314.)
- ²⁰³ L. Noël, *La guerre de 39 a commence 4 ans plus tôt*, Paris, 1979, p. 105.
- ²⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 159.
- ²⁰⁵ *Soviet Peace Efforts...*, Op. cit., Part One-Two.

- ²⁰⁶ K. Middlemas, Op. cit., p. 432.
- ²⁰⁷ *Soviet Peace Efforts...*, p. 72.
- ²⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 88.
- ²⁰⁹ Public Record Office, Cab. 27/627, p. 185.
- ²¹⁰ Paul Reynaud, *La France a sauvé l'Europe*, t. I, Paris, Flammarion, 1947, p. 575.
- ²¹¹ *Soviet Peace Efforts...*, p. 194.
- ²¹² Public Record Office, Cab 23/96, pp. 10, 283.
- ²¹³ *The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes*, Vol. II, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1954, p. 574.
- ²¹⁴ *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945*, Ser. D, Vol. IV, London, 1951, p. 321.
- ²¹⁵ *The New York Times*, 27 October 1938, p. 15.
- ²¹⁶ *Documents on Soviet Foreign Policy*, Vol. XXI, pp. 633-34.
- ²¹⁷ Public Record Office, Cab. 27/627, pp. 176-78, 185.
- ²¹⁸ *Papers and Memoirs of Józef Lipski*, Op. cit., pp. 370, 377, 380-81, 384-85, 397, 403, 405-10.
- ²¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 423, 424.
- ²²⁰ *Soviet Peace Efforts...*, pp. 27-28.
- ²²¹ *Documents on Soviet-Polish Relations*, Vol. VI, p. 366.
- ²²² *Soviet Peace Efforts...*, p. 63.
- ²²³ *Hungary and the Second World War*. Translated from Hungarian, Moscow, 1962, p. 129 (in Russian), DBFP, ser. 3, Vol. IV, London, 1951, p. 185.
- ²²⁴ *Documents on Soviet-Polish Relations*, Vol. VI, pp. 372, 373.
- ²²⁵ *Soviet Peace Efforts...*, p. 31-32.
- ²²⁶ *An Anatomy of War. New Documents on the Role of German Monopoly Capital in the Preparation and Prosecution of the Second World War*, Moscow, 1971, p. 186 (in Russian).
- ²²⁷ USSR FPA, s. 05, r. 18, f. 6, p. 37. Record of M. M. Litvinov's conversation with J. Baltrušaitis on 23 March 1938.
- ²²⁸ *Soviet Peace Efforts...*, p. 82.
- ²²⁹ FRUS, 1938, Vol. III, Washington, 1954, pp. 411-12. The Polish Ambassador in Moscow, Grzybowski held that Poland alone could dominate the USSR and that there was no point in "letting Germany into Russia". (*Documents on Soviet-Polish Relations*, Vol. VI, p. 372.)
- ²³⁰ *Soviet Peace Efforts...*, p. 142. Karszo-Siedlewski emphasised that he would gear his activities as Polish Minister in Tehran to carrying out this great Eastern concept since it was necessary, after all, to persuade and induce the Persians and Afghans to play "an active part in the future war against the Soviets".

- ²³¹ *Official Documents Concerning Polish-German and Polish-Soviet Relations, 1933-1939*, London, 1939, pp. 53-54.
- ²³² *Documents on Soviet-Polish Relations*, Vol. VII, Moscow, 1973, p. 22.
- ²³³ *Soviet Peace Efforts...*, p. 171.
- ²³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 199.
- ²³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 202.
- ²³⁶ It was earlier believed that in January 1939 Hitler was still planning a joint venture with Poland in attacking the USSR (see K. Hildebrand, *Deutsche Außenpolitik 1933-1945. Kalkül oder Dogma?*, Stuttgart, 1971, S. 85). Yet the evidence just cited clears up the matter.
- ²³⁷ *Das Abkommen von München 1938...*, Op. cit., S. 335.
- ²³⁸ David Irving, *The War Path. Hitler's Germany 1933-39*. London, 1978, p. 169.
- ²³⁹ *Soviet Peace Efforts...*, pp. 161-62.
- ²⁴⁰ *The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey*, Op. cit., p. 218; Besides, Harvey pointed out that there was growing unrest in Britain, particularly among the working class, as well as among intellectuals and professional people—journalists, office staffs... Conversely, the rich, industrialists, landowners, rentiers, party bosses, were still pleased with their lot, they did not as yet suspect that the Nazis would not guard their dividends and their property. Several days later, Harvey wrote that there were some in the Foreign Office, too, who were still sharing Chamberlain's view about the correctness of the Munich line of his policy of "peace at any price", since any war, whether won or lost, could destroy the rich classes.
- ²⁴¹ Public Record Office, Cab. 27/627, p. 177.
- ²⁴² K. Middlemas, Op. cit., p. 427.
- ²⁴³ Public Record Office, Cab. 27/627, pp. 176, 185, 187.
- ²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 188.
- ²⁴⁵ Georges Bonnet, *Défense de la paix. Fin d'une Europe. De Munich à la guerre*, Genève, Les Editions Cheval Ailé, 1948, pp. 126-27.
- ²⁴⁶ Public Record Office, FO 371. 229 88, C 2560/16/ 18, p. 216.

CHAPTER IV

- ¹ *Soviet Peace efforts...*, pp. 233-34. P. Kleist produced several books after the war (the last of them was *Die europäische Tragödie*, Pr. Oldendorf, 1971), in which he turned and twisted realities shamelessly in the spirit of Nazi propaganda, i.e. carrying on Goebbels' "Big Lie". As has just been shown, Kleist had helped Hitler and Ribbentrop in preparing the aggression against Poland, but in his books he seeks to prove that in 1939 he strove to preserve the friendliest possible relations between Germany and

Poland and to compose the differences between them. Although it has long been recognised, after the publication of the respective volumes of "Akten zur deutschen auswärtigen Politik", that the initiative towards normalising German-Soviet relations in the summer of 1939 was taken by Germany, he went on standing facts on their head until his dying day in a bid to prove the contrary (for this point see the chapter of this book dealing with the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact). During the war years, Kleist, on instructions from Ribbentrop, tried to start negotiations with the USSR about a separate peace, while he claimed that in this sense, too, the initiative was taken by the Soviet side (for the true picture see FRUS, 1943, Vol. I, Washington, 1963, pp. 502-03).

- ² *The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey 1937-1940*, Op. cit., p. 261.
- ³ D. Irving, *The War Path. Hitler's Germany 1933-1939*, Op. cit., p. 191.
- ⁴ W. L. Langer and S. E. Gleason, *The Challenge to Isolation. 1937-1940*, New York, 1952, p. 67.
- ⁵ *The 18th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. 10-27 March 1939*, Verbatim Report, Moscow, 1939, pp. 11-15.
- ⁶ *Izvestia*, 20 March 1939.
- ⁷ G. Niedhardt, *Grossbritannien und die Sowjetunion 1934-1939*, München, 1972, S. 392.
- ⁸ Public Record Office, Cab. 23/98, pp. 48-62.
- ⁹ *Soviet Peace Efforts...*, pp. 246-47.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 247.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 249.
- ¹² Public Record Office, Cab. 23/98, pp. 74-76, 80, 83.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 92.
- ¹⁴ *Soviet Peace Efforts...*, pp. 264-65.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 265.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 284.
- ¹⁷ *Papers and Memoirs of Józef Lipski...*, Op. cit., p. 507.
- ¹⁸ Butler, J.R.M. *Grand Strategy, September 1939-June 1941*, London, Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1957, pp. 10, 12.
- ¹⁹ *Soviet Peace Efforts...*, pp. 271-72.
- ²⁰ Public Record Office, FO 418/85, p. 117.
- ²¹ *Soviet Peace Efforts...*, pp. 282, 283.
- ²² *Ibid.*, p. 284.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 283-84.
- ²⁴ Sidney Aster, *1939. The Making of the Second World War*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1973, pp. 89, 94.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 89.

²⁶ S. Newman, *March 1939: The British Guarantee to Poland*, Oxford, 1976, pp. 146-48. Considering Poland's closest co-operation with Germany prior to 1938, particularly at the time of the Munich deal, the British Government found that it would not be an easy thing for her to do, still less so since there was information in London that Poland was negotiating to join the Anti-Comintern Pact.

²⁷ Public Record Office, Cab. 27/624, pp. 199-203, 206, 208, 211, 219.

²⁸ S. Newman, *March 1939. The British Guarantee to Poland...*, Op. cit., p. 172.

²⁹ DBFP, ser. 3, Vol. IV, London, 1951, p. 373.

³⁰ S. Newman, Op. cit., p. 172. In 1940 (after Germany had overrun Poland), J. Beck did actually offer to the Nazis to stand proxy for him, but the offer was not accepted.

³¹ Public Record Office, Cab. 23/98, pp. 157, 161-63, 165.

³² Polish-English Communiqué, *Official Documents Concerning Polish-German and Polish-Soviet Relations 1933-1939*, London, 1939, p. 74. The French Foreign Minister of the day, Georges Bonnet, subsequently wrote, concerning the issue of guarantees to Poland in the event of "indirect aggression", that these guarantees were quite understandable if one took into account the fact that the Czechoslovak President, Hacha, "had to choose between the two conditions which Hitler had laid down for him: either the destruction of Czech cities by German aircraft, or consent to a German protectorate" (G. Bonnet, *Fin d'une Europe*, Genève, 1948, p. 217).

³³ Zentrales Staatsarchiv (Potsdam), Film 4522. The Bucharest German Legation's cables of 14 and 15 April 1939.

³⁴ Public Record Office, Cab. 23/98, pp. 208-09.

³⁵ Public Record Office, Cab. 27/265, p. 138.

³⁶ K. Middlemas, Op. cit., p. 457.

³⁷ Zentrales Staatsarchiv (Potsdam), Film 4522.

³⁸ A. Adamthwaite, *France and the Coming of the Second World War. 1936-1939*, pp. 266, 271, 309.

³⁹ *Soviet Peace Efforts...*, p. 291.

⁴⁰ *International Affairs*, 1969, No. 7, p. 92.

⁴¹ A. Adamthwaite..., Op. cit., pp. 311, 312.

⁴² *Soviet Peace Efforts...*, pp. 324-25, 331.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 333.

⁴⁴ FRUS, 1939, Vol. 1, Washington, p. 248.

⁴⁵ *Soviet Peace Efforts...*, pp. 336-37.

⁴⁶ Public Record Office, Cab. 27/624, pp. 309-12.

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 298-99, 302.

⁴⁸ Public Record Office, Cab. 27/627, pp. 273, 275-77, 280-82.

⁴⁹ Public Record Office, Cab. 27/624, p. 319.

⁵⁰ Public Record Office, Cab. 23/99, pp. 58-61.

⁵¹ Cit. Niedhardt, Op. cit., S. 411.

⁵² *Soviet Peace Efforts...*, pp. 347, 351.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 367.

⁵⁴ Public Record Office, Cab. 23/99, pp. 128-30.

⁵⁵ *Chips. The Diaries of Sir Henry Channon*, Op. cit., p. 196.

⁵⁶ *Soviet Peace Efforts...*, p. 383.

⁵⁷ Public Record Office, Cab. 27/625, pp. 52-55.

⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 30-33.

⁵⁹ *The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey...*, Op. cit., p. 290.

⁶⁰ *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan 1938-1945*, Op. cit., p. 182.

⁶¹ *Chips. The Diaries of Sir Henry Channon*, Op. cit., p. 199.

⁶² W. Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol. I, Op. cit., p. 376.

⁶³ *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945*, Ser. D, Vol. VI, London, 1956, pp. 575, 576.

⁶⁴ Public Record Office, Cab. 23/99, pp. 272-75, 278, 284.

⁶⁵ *Chips. The Diaries of Sir Henry Channon*, Op. cit., p. 201.

⁶⁶ *Soviet Peace Efforts...*, pp. 417-18.

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 432-33.

⁶⁸ Public Record Office, Cab. 27/625, pp. 101-12.

⁶⁹ *Soviet Peace Efforts...*, p. 443 (in Russian).

⁷⁰ For details, see M. Pankrashova and V. Sipols, *Why the War Could Not Be Prevented. The Moscow Talks of the USSR, Britain and France in 1939*, Moscow, 1970, p. 55 (in Russian).

⁷¹ DBFP 1919-1939, ser. 3, Vol. VI, 1939, London, 1953, p. 162.

⁷² *Pravda*, 29 June 1939.

⁷³ *Soviet Peace Efforts...*, p. 476.

⁷⁴ Not even N. Chamberlain could fail to admit that "the Russians had every intention of reaching an agreement" with Britain and Franco (Public Record Office, Cab. 27/625, p. 186).

⁷⁵ Public Record Office, Cab. 27/625, pp. 236-37.

⁷⁶ Public Record Office, Cab. 23/99, pp. 129-30.

⁷⁷ Public Record Office, Cab. 27/625, pp. 254-70.

⁷⁸ DBFP 1919-1939, ser. 3, Vol. VI, 1939, London, 1953, p. 328.

⁷⁹ FRUS, 1939, Vol. I, p. 272.

⁸⁰ *I Documenti diplomatici italiani. Ottava serie: 1935-1939*, Vol. XII, La Libreria Dello Stato, Roma, 1942, p. 313.

⁸¹ Public Record Office, Cab. 23/100, p. 186, Cab. 27/625, pp. 293-94.

⁸² *Soviet Peace Efforts...*, p. 496.

⁸³ DBFP, 1919-1939, ser. 3, Vol. VI, 1939, London, 1953, pp. 423, 425-26.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 457; *Soviet Peace Efforts...*, p. 515.

⁸⁵ IDA, Microfilm Bank, E. Racinski's letter of June 8, 1939, to Poland's Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

⁸⁶ Public Record Office, Cab. 23/99, pp. 121-22, 124-26.

⁸⁷ H. Nicolson, *Diaries and Letters 1930-1939*, Collins, London, 1966, p. 401.

⁸⁸ FRUS, 1939, Vol. I, p. 193.

⁸⁹ DCFP, Ser. D, Vol. VI, pp. 978, 980, 981.

⁹⁰ Public Record Office, FO 371.22990, C 10371/16/18, p. 299.

⁹¹ *Documents and Materials Relating to the Eve of the Second World War*, Vol. II, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow 1948, p. 118.

⁹² *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945*, Ser. D, Vol. VI, London, 1956, p. 540.

⁹³ W. L. Langer, S. E. Gleason, *The Challenge to Isolation*, Op. cit., p. 76.

⁹⁴ Hugh R. Wilson, *A Career Diplomat*, Vantage Press, New York, 1960, p. 111.

⁹⁵ *FRUS. Diplomatic Papers 1939*, Vol. I, p. 194.

⁹⁶ For example, Lipski, on arriving in Warsaw on 8 August, 1939, informed Reck and Rydz-Smigly that "German armaments and preparations for war are in full swing" and that Poland "should be prepared for any eventuality". (*Papers and Memoirs of Józef Lipski*, Columbia University Press, New York and London, 1968, p. 553.)

⁹⁷ *Soviet Peace Efforts...*, p. 389.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 393.

⁹⁹ *Documents on Soviet-Polish Relations*, Vol. VII, p. 112.

¹⁰⁰ Romania's position remained anti-Soviet and pro-German. In a conversation with the French Minister, Thierry, the Romanian King Carol declared that Romania would take no part in any measures Germany might regard as directed against her. He underscored his anti-Soviet stand and his negative attitude to the Anglo-Franco-Soviet negotiations. (Zentrales Staatsarchiv (Potsdam), Film 4522; see the German ambassador's letter of May 13, 1939, from London).

¹⁰¹ *Soviet Peace Efforts...*, p. 414.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 537.

¹⁰³ DBFP 1919-1939, ser. 3, Vol. VII, 1939, London, 1954, pp. 258-59.

¹⁰⁴ *Soviet Peace Efforts...*, pp. 525-27, 537-38, 540, 562 etc.

¹⁰⁵ Public Record Office, Cab. 27/625, p. 268.

¹⁰⁶ Lord Strang, *Home and Abroad...*, Op. cit., pp. 193-94.

¹⁰⁷ *Soviet Peace Efforts...*, p. 697.

¹⁰⁸ Public Record Office, Cab. 23/100, pp. 224-25.

¹⁰⁹ DBFP, ser. 3, Vol. VI, p. 763.

¹¹⁰ Public Record Office, Cab. 27/625.

¹¹¹ Général Beaufre, *Le Drame de 1940*, Op. cit., p. 2.

¹¹² Public Record Office, Prem. 1/311.

¹¹³ DBFP 1919-1939, ser. 3, Vol. VI, 1939, London, 1953, pp. 682, 683.

¹¹⁴ Zentrales Staatsarchiv (Potsdam), Film 4522.

¹¹⁵ DBFP, ser. 3, Vol. VI, p. 461.

¹¹⁶ FRUS, 1939, vol. I, p. 294.

¹¹⁷ Général Beaufre, *Le Drame de 1940*. Paris, 1965, pp. 123-24. L. Noël, *La guerre de 39 a commencé 4 ans plus tôt*, Paris, 1979, p. 123. ADAP, Serie D, Bd. VII, Baden-Baden, 1956, S. 247.

¹¹⁸ DBFP 1919-1939, ser. 3, Vol. VI, 1939, London, 1953, pp. 682, 683.

¹¹⁹ *Soviet Peace Efforts...*, pp. 546-48.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 551-54.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 557.

¹²² *Ibid.*, pp. 560-61.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 566-68, 572.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 563, 569.

¹²⁵ S. Aster, 1939, *The Making of the Second World War*, Op. cit., p. 303.

¹²⁶ *A History of Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917-1945*, Vol. I, p. 377.

¹²⁷ S. Aster, Op. cit., pp. 305-06.

¹²⁸ A. Adamthwaite, *France and the Coming of the Second World War 1936-1939*, London, 1977, p. 340. That was also the position of the Romanian government. (Zentrales Staatsarchiv, (Potsdam), Film 13304, cable of 24 August, 1939, from the German Legation in Romania.)

- ¹²⁹ *Soviet Peace Efforts...*, pp. 574-77.
- ¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 582, 619.
- ¹³¹ Général Beaufre, *Le Drame de 1940*, Op. cit., pp. 149.
- ¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 156.
- ¹³³ *Soviet Peace Efforts...*, p. 623 (in Russian).
- ¹³⁴ DBFP 1919-1939, ser. 3, Vol. VII, 1939, London, 1954, p. 91.
- ¹³⁵ *Papers and Memoirs of Józef Lipski...*, pp. 563-65.
- ¹³⁶ Général Beaufre, *Le Drame de 1940*, pp. 118, 124.
- ¹³⁷ DGFP, Ser. D, Vol. VII, p. 27.
- ¹³⁸ Public Record Office, Cab. 23/100, p. 325.
- ¹³⁹ *Soviet Peace Efforts...*, pp. 624, 626, 627.
- ¹⁴⁰ *International Affairs*, 1969, No. 11, p. 108.
- ¹⁴¹ *Soviet Peace Efforts...*, pp. 631-36.
- ¹⁴² *The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes*, Vol. II, Op. cit., p. 705.
- ¹⁴³ In 1941, when the course of events brought Britain within a coalition with the USSR, which was her only hope for salvation, Halifax admitted in a diary, referring to Britain's reluctance to conclude an alliance with the USSR in 1939: "That was a mistake. We must not repeat it". (F. Birkenhead, *Halifax*, London, 1965, p. 440.)
- ¹⁴⁴ USSR FPA, s. 06, r. 1, f. 267, pp. 7-8.
- ¹⁴⁵ *Soviet Peace Efforts...*, p. 691.
- ¹⁴⁶ D. Bergamini, *Japan's Imperial Conspiracy*, London, 1971, p. 696.
- ¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 702.
- ¹⁴⁸ *Soviet Peace Efforts...*, p. 406.
- ¹⁴⁹ *Pravda*, 1 June 1939.
- ¹⁵⁰ *Voprosy istorii*, 1974, No. 3, p. 204.
- ¹⁵¹ *A History of the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union 1941-1945*, Vol. I, p. 244 (in Russian).
- ¹⁵² ADAP, Vol. VI, Ser. D, p. 546. The Soviet government was informed about that decision.
- ¹⁵³ Public Record Office, Cab. 27/625, p. 246.
- ¹⁵⁴ In a report of 28 January, 1939, the German General Staff said, for instance: "The peace-time Russian Armed Forces are numerically a gigantic military instrument. Their fighting capability, generally, is up-to-date. Operational principles are clear and definite. The country's wealth of resources and the depth of operational space are their good allies" (Lev Bezymensky, *The*

- Special File "Barbarossa". Documentary Novel*, Moscow, 1972, p. 95—in Russian).
- ¹⁵⁵ D. M. Proektor, *Aggression and Catastrophe. The Supreme Military Command of Nazi Germany in the Second World War. 1939-1945*, Moscow, p. 46 (in Russian).
- ¹⁵⁶ DBFP 1919-1939, ser. 3, Vol. VI, 1939, London, 1953, p. 2. The Polish government, too, knew about this opinion of Keitel and Brauchitsch, yet it did not change its negative attitude to co-operation with the USSR.
- ¹⁵⁷ L. Mosley, *On Borrowed Time*, Op. cit., p. 252.
- ¹⁵⁸ E. Kordt, *Nicht aus den Akten...*, Op. cit., S. 310.
- ¹⁵⁹ *Die Weizsäcker-Papiere 1933-1950*, Hrsg. vom L. E. Hill. Propyläen Verlag. Fr./M. 1974, S. 157.
- ¹⁶⁰ L. Mosley, Op. cit., p. 255.
- ¹⁶¹ *Die Weizsäcker-Papiere*, Op. cit., S. 181.
- ¹⁶² *Soviet Peace Efforts...*, p. 455 (in Russian).
- ¹⁶³ *Die Weizsäcker-Papiere*, Op. cit., S. 176.
- ¹⁶⁴ D. Irving, *The War Path. Hitler's Germany 1933-1939*, London, 1978, p. 180.
- ¹⁶⁵ Quoted from: I. Y. Androsov, *On the Eve of the Second World War. In: Voprosy istorii*, 1972, No. 9, p. 137 (in Russian).
- ¹⁶⁶ *A History of Soviet Foreign Policy. 1917-1945*, Vol. I, p. 390.
- ¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁶⁸ *Voprosy istorii*, No. 9, 1972, p. 140.
- ¹⁶⁹ ADAP, Ser. D, Bd. VI, p. 497.
- ¹⁷⁰ *A History of the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union*, Vol. I, p. 174 (in Russian).
- ¹⁷¹ *Die Weizsäcker-Papiere 1933-1950*, S. 154.
- ¹⁷² *A History of Soviet Foreign Policy. 1917-1945*, Vol. I, p. 390.
- ¹⁷³ ADAP, Ser. D, Bd. VI, S. 649.
- ¹⁷⁴ *Istoria SSSR*, 1962, No. 3, p. 21; *Voprosy istorii*, 1972, No. 10, p. 100.
- ¹⁷⁵ ADAP, Op. cit., p. 680.
- ¹⁷⁶ *A History of Soviet Foreign Policy. 1917-1945*, Vol. I, pp. 390-91.
- ¹⁷⁷ ADAP, Serio D, Bd. VI, S.S. 847-49.
- ¹⁷⁸ *A History of the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union*, Vol. I, p. 174.
- ¹⁷⁹ *Voprosy istorii*, 1972, No. 10, p. 104.
- ¹⁸⁰ ADAP, ser. D, Vol. VI, Baden-Baden, 1956, S. 894.
- ¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 905.

¹⁸² *Die Weizsäcker-Papiere 1933-1950*, Op. cit., S.S. 157-58.

¹⁸³ *A History of the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union, 1941-1945*, Vol. I, pp. 174-75.

¹⁸⁴ L. Mosley, *On Borrowed Time*, Op. cit., p. 288.

¹⁸⁵ ADAP, ser. D, Bd. VII, S.S. 63-64.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 70, 95-96.

¹⁸⁷ A. Speer, *Erinnerungen*, Frankfurt/M., 1969, S. 176.

¹⁸⁸ ADAP, ser. D, Bd. VII, S.S. 95-96.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, S.S. 141, 142.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, S. 131.

¹⁹¹ Zentrales Staatsarchiv (Potsdam), Film 10520.

¹⁹² *A History of Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917-1945*, Vol. I, p. 392.

¹⁹³ *Izvestia*, 27 August 1939.

¹⁹⁴ *Istoria SSSR*, 1962, No. 3, p. 23.

¹⁹⁵ *Izvestia*, 1 September 1939.

¹⁹⁶ *Soviet Peace Efforts...*, p. 637.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 639.

¹⁹⁸ J. V. Stalin said, for instance, in a conversation with Latvian Foreign Minister V. Munters, a month later (on 2 October 1939) that the possibility of a German attack on the USSR could not be ruled out. For six years, the Nazis had been up against the USSR. Now there was an unexpected turn of the tide. That sort of thing might happen in history. But you could not depend on it. You had to get ready for any eventuality in good time. (IDA, s. 38d, r. 22, f. 222, p. 24.)

¹⁹⁹ *Izvestia*, 1 September 1939.

²⁰⁰ FRUS, 1939, Vol. I, p. 307. The Soviet government, being most anxious to prevent Poland from being destroyed by the Nazi Reich, was still prepared to come to her assistance. There was a particularly noteworthy fact on the 2nd of September, just the day after the Nazi Reich's attack on Poland, when Britain and France, for all their allied treaties with Poland, were still silent about their position. The Soviet Ambassador in Warsaw, N. I. Sharonov called on the Polish Minister for Foreign Affairs, J. Beck and, with reference to K. Y. Voroshilov's interview of 27 August, which mentioned possible Soviet deliveries of war equipment to Poland, asked him why Poland was not turning to the Soviet Union for aid. It took, however, the Polish government a whole week to give instructions to its Ambassador in Moscow, W. Grzybowski, to contact the Soviet government on the subject. It was, however, too late because by that time the outcome of the war between Germany and Poland was a foregone conclusion.

²⁰¹ Georges Bonnet, *Défense de la paix. Fin d'une Europe, Genève*, 1948, p. 291.

²⁰² *Istoria SSSR*, 1962, No. 3, pp. 22-23.

²⁰³ A summary of this Foreign Office cable was handed over on 27 August to the U.S. Department of State by the British ambassador in Washington. (FRUS, 1939, Vol. I, p. 307.)

²⁰⁴ *International Affairs*, 1969, No. 11, p. 111.

²⁰⁵ *Soviet Peace Efforts...*, p. 640.

²⁰⁶ A. Adamthwaite, *France and the Coming of the Second World War, 1936-1939*, London, 1977, p. 341.

²⁰⁷ ADAP, Ser. D, Vol. VII, S. 168.

²⁰⁸ G. Ciano, *Diario*, Vol. I, Milano, 1963, p. 5.

²⁰⁹ *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, London, 1948, p. 304.

²¹⁰ *Soviet Peace Efforts...*, p. 455.

²¹¹ DBFP 1919-1939, ser. 3, Vol. VII, 1939, London, 1954, pp. 127-28.

²¹² FRUS, 1939, Vol. I, Washington, 1956, p. 354.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 355-56.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 356.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 376-77.

²¹⁶ *Soviet Peace Efforts...*, p. 638.

²¹⁷ *The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey*, p. 307.

²¹⁸ Public Record Office, Cab. 23/100, p. 277.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 375.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 402.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 379.

²²² DBFP, ser. 3, Vol. VII, pp. 330-332.

²²³ *I documenti diplomatici italiani*, ser. 8, vol. XIII, Roma, 1953, pp. 258-59. On August 31 Mussolini, too, took the initiative in proposing a conference to be called on 5 September to review the articles of the Treaty of Versailles which had bred the conflict. Chamberlain and Daladier accepted the proposal.

²²⁴ Public Record Office, Cab. 23/100, p. 423.

²²⁵ FRUS, 1939, Vol. I, p. 392.

²²⁶ *Documents diplomatiques. 1938-1939*, Paris, 1939, pp. 266-67.

²²⁷ DBFP, ser. 3, Vol. VII, p. 351.

²²⁸ H. A. Jacobsen, *Der Weg zur Teilung der Welt*, Koblenz/Bonn, 1977, S. 27.

²²⁹ V. T. Fomin, *Nazi Germany's Aggression in Europe*, p. 623 (in Russian).

²³⁰ FRUS, 1939, Vol. I, pp. 301-04, 398-99.

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